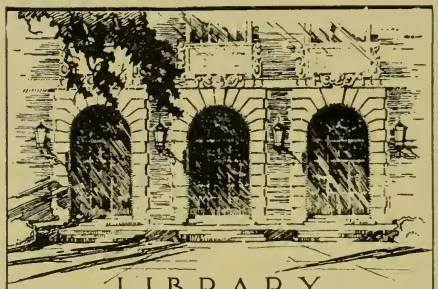
Who is Vera?

by A. L. Schlichter



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
Sch59w
v.1

WHO IS VERA?

Still a Wife's Sister

A NOVEL

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY A. E. SCHLÖTEL

'Let me not to the marriage of true mind
Admit impediments.'—*Shakespeare.*

Opinions of the Press.

'The book is cleverly written, and the interest is maintained fairly well throughout.'—*Church Times.*

'Is a very ingeniously complicated and successfully-told history. The descriptions are well done, and the author seems as much at home under Italian skies, or in South America, as off the Cornish coast.'—*Yorkshire Post.*

'A good deal of capital writing in the novel. The hero marries his deceased wife's sister, and is very happy; but the law is hard upon him. Still, he has his deceased wife's sister.'—*Western Morning News.*

'There is interesting, even exciting, material here for a story.'—*Sheffield Daily Telegraph.*

'The three volumes which make up this novel are crowded with characters, full of incident, and replete with plot and counterplot. . . . . The characters of the middle-aged lawyer, Dr Penson, and of the young lady who earns her living by writing sermons, and who becomes Dr Penson's fourth wife, in spite of his objections to her "opinions," are well drawn, and the book is evidently the work of one possessed of both learning and common sense.'—*Jewish World.*

'In an excellent, though complicated, story, full of incident, adventure, and capitally-drawn characters, the writer puts up an earnest plea for a change in the marriage laws, which forbid a man to marry his deceased wife's sister. . . . . It is, in point of merit, much above the average of novels, while some of the characters are really fine creations.'—*Newcastle Weekly Chronicle.*

LONDON
GRIFFITH, FARRAN, OKEDEN & WELSH
(SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERY AND HARRIS)
WEST CORNER ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

Who is Vera?

A NOVEL

Wherein English and Russian Lives are Interwoven

BY

A. E. SCHLÖTEL

AUTHOR OF

'STILL A WIFE'S SISTER'

Though human, thou did'st not deceive me;
Though woman, thou did'st not forsake;
Though lov'd, thou forborest to grieve me;
Though slander'd, thou never could'st shake;
Though trusted, thou did'st not disclaim me;
Though parted, it was not to fly;
Though watchful, 'twas not to defame me;
Nor mute, that the world might belie.—BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON

GRIFFITH, FARRAN, OKEDEN & WELSH

(SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERY AND HARRIS)

WEST CORNER ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

AND SYDNEY, N.S.W.

1888

[*The Rights of Translation and of Reproduction are reserved.*]

823
Sch 59w
v. 1

Dedication.

TO

MY DEAR FRIEND

MARION E. ROBERTSON,

I DEDICATE

THIS WORK, AS A SLIGHT TOKEN

OF MY GREAT ESTEEM

AND LOVE.

A. E. SCHLÖTEL.

Gunnsday 16 Sept 57 Spencer 31

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. PAGE

THE ACTRESS, ... 1

CHAPTER II.

A ROMEO AND JULIET, ... 8

CHAPTER III.

LAKE WINDERMERE, ... 30

CHAPTER IV.

NOT GREEN, ... 37

CHAPTER V.

ARE THE BONDS OF MARRIAGE DISHONOURABLE? . 49

CHAPTER VI.

RUPTURE, ... 64

CHAPTER VII.

THE TURK, ... 73

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE MEETING, ... 78

CHAPTER IX.

A WIFE'S INFLUENCE, ... 87

CHAPTER X.

THE BISHOP OF MALAVITA, ... 103

CHAPTER XI.

'THE LAURIUM,' 113

CHAPTER XII.

PAGE

A HOARD DESTROYED, ... 130

CHAPTER XIII.

TALK ABOUT OLD TIMES, ... 135

CHAPTER XIV.

A BREAKFAST TÊTE-À-TÊTE, ... 153

CHAPTER XV.

A PATRIOT AND HIS WIFE, ... 163

CHAPTER XVI.

A PEACEMAKER, ... 186

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS CADE'S DILEMMA, ... 196

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ROUND TABLE, ... 218

CHAPTER XIX.

A SHADOW OF THE FUTURE, ... 234

CHAPTER XX.

ATHELSTAN'S HOME, ... 246

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BISHOP'S LETTER, ... 258

CHAPTER XXII.

DISCLOSURES, ... 265

CHAPTER XXIII.

ATHELSTAN'S VISIT TO MAGNA HOUSE, ... 278

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS MORGANE'S DEVICE, ... 284

CHAPTER XXV.

FORTUNE-SEEKING, ... 289

WHO IS VERA?

CHAPTER I.

THE ACTRESS.

'Therefore she walks through the great city, veiled
In virtue's adamantine eloquence;
'Gainst scorn, and death, and pain thus trebly mailed;
And blending in the smiles of that defence
The serpent and the dove—wisdom and innocence.'

Revolt of Islam.

THE glare of the gaslights had been cast into darkness; a crowd of gay spectators had left untenanted seats that were now covered with coarse cloth thrown hastily over them; quiet and gloom reigned in heavy oppression where applause, and glee, and cheery voices had rung

out well-deserved plaudits: the performance at a London theatre was over, and the very air seemed changed to a noxious, gaseous atmosphere in the lone darkness.

The exterior of the theatre was dull; the night dark; the gaslights reflecting on the still wet pavement rendered it shiny; and brightness and shadow alternately marked the pathway. Rain had ceased, but threatened to pour down again at no far distant moment.

The actors and actresses were *en route*, some to quiet, sad homes, others to enjoy a merry supper, and gay, light, happy talk among kindred spirits, before the vein of play and mirth had become drowsy, to remind them that rest was needed before the morrow—a morrow that would surely bring requirements mental and physical, which *nolens volens* must be performed, under contract with managers to whom time and talent had been sold.

An almost child-actress, fair and sylph-like, might be seen tripping lightly along the nearly deserted streets; it was no night for pedestrians, but her conveyance and her guardian had failed to reach the theatre at the appointed time. All unseen by her fellows, she slipped out of the theatre, and purposed to make her journey home on foot.

Little progress was made when a large drop of rain fell heavily on her nose; this reminded

her she was unprovided with an umbrella, and that it would be well to hasten her steps; more drops came in quick succession, then a pelting downpour. She took shelter under the first portico that offered protection from weather, there to wait the cessation of rain that in its present force could not continue long, judging from experience that nearly thirteen summers passed in England had taught her. She felt she was a trespasser, but gained her object in keeping herself dry.

A large gas lamp hung under the portico, and shed a fierce light on features that could well bear the brilliant glare that brought out to clear view beauty often spoken of, often seen on canvas, but possessed by less than one in a thousand. They were of marked type, and one that candle or gas light robbed not of charm. The complexion fair, untinted in its whiteness, except where the youthful bloom of rosy hue, deep yet soft, painted the cheek with tone of health; hazel eyes, lustrous and full as a trusty dog's, shaded with long, bright golden lashes, flashed the light of intellect and innocence in their clear, ardent glances.

Upon the ruddy lips still played the smile of pleasure caused by recent praise, and were ready to part in a merry laugh, actuated by the heart-felt lightness still warm in the happiness of contentment that animated the young, blithe being;

for she felt she had within her grasp the crown of success, and hoped she was well on the road to lasting fame that would ensure her fortune.

The rain dripped from the portico, and was forming little rills and pools on the worn pavement; the wind stirred, and drove the rain drops under the portico; the young girl changed her position and went close to the door. Under the knocker she read, 'Knock and ring,' and wished she could avail herself of the invitation. But no, it was not for her; she did not know the occupant of the house, and the general invitation was not accepted, much as better shelter was desired. Then her quick eye read the sentence over the letter-box—'Do not ring unless an answer is required.' This suggested to her mind that the establishment was one in which an extra servant was needed, —that economy was practised, even though the owner of the house might be wealthy, which she decided he must be.

Then she fell into a train of thought, suggesting to her mind the vastness of the necessary income required to keep up such an establishlishment, to which she supplemented another in the country; and possibly the owners possessed property in moors, a marine residence, and revelled in hunting and sport, travel and expensive pleasures. 'Ah!' the girl sighed and thought on, 'with all this wealth they are no

happier than I, perhaps not so happy, they in their well-lighted rooms, and I under their portico in the rain, and wind, and darkness; they burdened with wealth, I earning my bread. Yet I do wish I was under my own roof and out of this pelting rain. I have done a foolish act. Nobody will know where to find me.'

The sound of wheels was heard. Instinctively the young girl looked towards the street; a hansom cab drew up and stopped at the curb, and from it hastily sprung a man. Hurriedly he ran up the steps, and found himself face to face with the weatherbound actress, who said quickly,—

'Have you further use for that cab, permit me to ask?'

Had not the glare of gas shown him her features, her voice would have told him she was 'his destiny'—a voice that for many days past had rung in his ears as he fell asleep, and whispered an echo when he awoke.

'It is at your service,' replied the man.

The young actress signed to the cabman to stop, for he had delayed in lowering the glass blind, that hitched somewhere, and prevented him driving off.

'Give me a minute's grace, and you shall have the protection of an umbrella. I think I recognise you as—as—Miss Verge.'

The man raised his hat slightly, and thought

the face still more beautiful, heightened by the becoming effect of the light woollen cloud around the throat, than when behind the footlights.

'You are quite right; and I fancy I recognise in you my friend who has more than once made me nervous. But I may be wrong, if this is your house; no critic earning his guineas could live here. I will accept your offer of an umbrella—the rain is dreadful now.'

The actress, when saying these words, looked in the man's face, and the thought followed, 'What a handsome Romeo he would make.'

'I have relations living here,' replied the man hesitatingly; and he opened the door with his latchkey. He quickly obtained an umbrella, turned off the tap of the gas lamp, and the darkness that followed was felt in the sudden extinction of light.

'Oh! why do so? I cannot see the first step.'

'Pardon. I did not think of that; the light was left for me to extinguish. . . . Take my arm, and you will be safe. So, step again; now, the first step.'

'Please, the umbrella a little lower, the rain beats on my face. Thanks.'

The actress seated herself in the cab.

'It is late—I will accompany you.'

'Distinctly and decidedly no,' replied the girl, with firmness.

Then she told the cabman the number of the

house, and name of the street to which he was to drive her, and ordered him to quickly lower the glass shade, for the rain beat upon her.

'I will place the umbrella there, outside, across the door. I, like Paul Pry, have an affection for my umbrella, and do not wish to lose it. I will call for it to-morrow.'

'I have no further use for it. Pray remove it,' was the answer given.

'Certainly. Yet to-morrow I will call on you, and make inquiries as to your safe arrival.'

The glass hitched again before it dropped into its proper place. The actress had time to admire the former occupant of her cab, and decided again, 'How charming a Romeo he would make!' She said,—

'Little need to trouble yourself. I am not travelling in a land peopled by Arab tribes, but in civilised Britain; no harm can overtake me. Do not give me a second thought; an hour hence I shall rest in perfect peace, and sleep well. My day's work is ended, and I am weary.'

The man returned to the dark portico. The young actress was driven to her home, and on the way she dreamed of her future fame, but little dreamed that her rest in perfect peace was even now at an end.

CHAPTER II.

A ROMEO AND JULIET.

'Beneath this starry arch,
Nought resteth, or is still;
But all things hold their march,
As if by one great will.
Moves one, move all;
Hark to the footfall!
On, on for ever.

Yon sheaves were once but seed;
Will ripens into deed:
As cave-drops swell the streams,
Day thoughts feed nightly dreams;
And sorrow tracketh wrong,
As echo follows song.
On, on, for ever.'

Song of August—H. MARTINEAU.

THE morrow came.

Early was the hour that brought the fascinated Romeo to the home of the sad Juliet; so early, that the door steps were receiving their matutinal mopping and sluicing, and the entrance door stood open.

'You need not ring, our lad is out. Your name and business, please?' said the servant, who stayed the process of sluicing to accost the stranger, and trundled her mop as the young man questioned her.

'Is Miss Verge at home?'

'Certainly. The actress, you mean?'

The man's face was suffused with colour, as his indignation was roused by the tone of voice in which the sentence was uttered.

'Can I see Miss Verge?' he asked.

'She's a particular lady. What is your name and business? I must give both, or she may refuse to see you.' The young man hesitated a minute. The woman continued,—'Are you a hairdresser or draper? They are admitted at all times. Their time's precious.'

'Neither: a visitor,' said the young man curtly.

'Your card, please, and I beg pardon. Men of all professions and trades are so much alike now-a-days. In my young days, gentlemen were stamped gentlemen; now, any shoddy makes a gentleman.'

The woman put her wet hand under her apron, to take the card that she expected to be proffered her.

The visitor still hesitated. The she-dragon at the door that stopped his entrance must be appeased, and yet he desired to keep his name unknown; she devised the means, as she said,—

'If a card is scarce, dare say you have an old envelope addressed to you; for my part, I think that more genuine than a bit of pasteboard; any scamp can get that manufactured, living at no home that is known.'

A bright thought at the right moment. The she-dragon was propitiated; the envelope of a letter was put in her hand that bore a name and address, but not those of the visitor, and the guarded portal was passed by the unknown intruder.

'Beg pardon, all the uppers are out or busy.'

'Possibly I can find my way unannounced.'

'La! all this house does not belong to Miss Verge. She's the drawing-room flat. Tell me your name as is written here—all dash and splash obscurity in zigzags—and just follow me, and I will sing it out. Sorry the lad's not in—for you are a gent. and no mistake—and he hates me to meddle with his work; he calls me a heathen, he does; but I call myself the slavey of the crew, I do.'

'That letter is addressed to the Honourable C. F. Crispe,' said the stranger carelessly.

The woman closed the door, and, in her untidy condition, preceded the visitor, with quick, heavy step, up a broad staircase, and stopped on a landing spacious and handsome, bearing indications of having been once in the possession of wealthy owners. On this landing,

decorated with columns and niches for statuary, opened four doors. 'Number six is the drawing-room, slow and sure,' muttered the woman, as the young man delayed. He had to form plans that took him a few seconds, whilst she wriggled the handle of the door, with her wet hand under the apron, that was used as a safeguard to prevent soiling all she touched, though the apron retained little of the whiteness that it possessed when it left the loom.

The visitor was now by the door.

'Your envelope bothers me, and the door too; and yet I would do the lad's work well if I could, and sing your name out.'

Within the room a voice said, 'Come in.' A minute more the door was opened from the inside.

'Poor imbecile, what does she want?' thought Miss Verge, when she heard the step and voice of the woman.

'His Honour, Cef Crispe, asks a word with you, Miss Verge.'

The charming Romeo was again face to face with his Juliet, and she heeded not the misnomer by which he was ushered into her presence. He met her eye now for the first time in broad daylight, and it brightened when she recognised her friend-in-need of the previous evening.

Her golden hair was hanging loose, bound

only with a broad band that gathered it together to prevent too heavy a preponderance falling about her face and arms, and it streamed in long tresses over her shoulders. Her dress was simple as a child's, hanging in graceful folds that took their play from the figure that upheld them rather than from the art of the *tailleuse*. The material was not costly, — a cotton fabric of the pale colour of tea rose— around her neck was a ribbon band of the palest blue, likewise the fillet that bound her hair was of the same soft hue. She would have personated a zephyr to the poet's or painter's imagination, so light and aerial was her appearance, and so noiseless her step.

Miss Verge was lovely, and beloved for her loveliness; and her Romeo decided she must be capable of loving. For many days past he had hoped to gain her admiration; he fostered this hope, born from the longings of his own impassioned heart. This hope, now that he saw his dream of loveliness before him in the home garb of simplicity and natural vein of disposition, and no longer in dreamland, made him bashful, fearful, and nervous. These three impediments to his entire happiness were increased by the remembrance of a conversation he had had with his paternal parent, who had met him in no friendly frame of mind on his return home the previous evening, as he passed the

darkened portico and entered his house, after he had placed the young actress in his discharged cab. His parent had given vent to his displeasure in full force; and in his anger and indignation had seemed to grow grander in aspect and taller in stature, though garbed in the non-dignity-giving costume of dressing-gown and slippers, and the still less imposing addition of hair dishevelled, and candle in hand —for he had awoke in fright from a first sleep.

Being disturbed at an unseemly hour caused irritation to a highly sensitive nature. The disquieted parent, hearing voices under his portico, had quickly imagined mischief working in his household. He was pained to find the culprit his own son. A son whose character had been spotless until that hour, but now must be distrusted and treated as faithless to his word and honour, until he retrieved both by test and trial. Question followed question as suspicion was aroused. Were the debts he had contracted those that an honourable man would not be ashamed of? Were the pastimes he indulged in profitable, and becoming a Christian man in a Christian land? Did he pass his time idly in wicked theatres, worldly clubs, and in society that would be a curse to body and soul? Had he distributed the tracts given to him to dispose of among the ignorant, heedless, and unthinking? and did he require one himself to save

him from the 'wrath to come,' and from present wickedness? He should receive one to reflect on that night. The enraged parent had heard his son almost deny his home; he had carelessly said a relation of his lived in his father's house, and said that to a 'giddy girl, who spoke with familiarity.' Yes, he had heard all. He dived his hand into his deep pocket and drew out a tract—tracts abounded in every pocket he possessed; he glanced at the title, and said, with sanctimonious solemnity, 'Good watch-words, "The wages of sin is death." Read, mark, and inwardly digest that, and, having devoured the contents this night, let me see the outward sign of the good seed thus implanted. Your latch-key I retain, to be restored to you when I see the fruits of repentance visibly shown in the course of a better life.'

The young man had taken the tract and given his latch-key up to his would-be protector, with the full conviction that his father was in error, and that he was pursuing a course that was honourable and congenial, replete with goodness, and well according with his principles,—principles that were diametrically opposed to his father's. He had neither defended himself nor his newly-made acquaintance. Self-defence was never his policy with his father, but he did not read the tract nor take to heart the forfeiture of latch-key. In a word, the son distrusted the

father far more than the father distrusted the son; but the filial feeling of the son actuated him to treat with profound respect his puritanical parent, who had exacted from him from boyhood an entire deference, even to blind obedience, that neutralised his character to a sham in his own home. This deference had grown into habit from the effect of long usage now he attained manhood, yet it was unspiced with love or admiration for the object who called it forth.

Thus the memory of the previous evening's altercation rendered the handsome Romeo bashful, fearful, and nervous when he was again in the presence of his Juliet; but Juliet would have been wanting in wit and perception, had she not been able to dispel embarrassment by a word of kind welcome, even though given to a stranger; for the stranger had been kind to her, and this demanded civility in return on her part.

She proffered her hand, nameless as he still was to her except under the misnomer that she gave little heed to, blurted out indistinctly by the woman, who muttered, as she closed the door behind her, 'Suppose I am right to leave him, though he has no box of frizzled wigs. A hairdresser? No, he is stamped from head to foot a gentleman; but I'll just hide the umbrellas before I take my mop in hand—they are all I'm responsible for; the actress will take

care of her own good name, doubtless. But she is wondrous beautiful, and that's a snare—not a worse on earth; and sharp as I keep an eye on the area and front steps, I never saw his feet on them before; but they are honest feet, I'll swear, that dance under such a manly face as Cef Crisp's.' Nevertheless, the umbrellas were put safe out of sight.

A short talk for the space of a quarter of an hour sufficed to make the strangers of yesterday friends of to-day. Miss Verge, finding her guest still prolonged his visit, asked permission to continue the case she was making to cover her pet canaries, as time pressed, and they were to be removed to the country in the course of a few hours. She stated she intended to follow them after the lapse of a day or two. Her birds were dear to her—she had reared them herself. Without doubt they would like the country better than London, but she feared her time might hang heavily. To think over her fate made her sad.

A disappointment amounting to pain passed through the feelings of the visitor. He knew so little of the young girl who held his love so firmly; but he knew for many days past that the world, without the hope of hearing her voice, or seeing her beaming face and eye, would become a desolate, dreary desert, with no object of living interest in it for him, rendering his life lone and blank. The actual hearing and seeing

her had had the talismanic effect of making life lovely, and replete with brightness. He felt he lived day after day on the hope that he might see her, though only on the boards of the stage, for he could not surmount obstacles that blocked his way to gain an introduction or interview with her. He was a stranger, and she an actress. Yet he knew he loved her, knowing nothing of her. Now, gaining a long-desired but accidental acquaintance, was he to hear that he had a rival, and that his heart's choice was about to pitch her tent in the country far away from him? He was much in earnest, and yet so diffident, that he feared he could not gain the truth that he ardently desired to know, of a probability that had never till this moment whispered a thought to damage his hopes. All absorbed as he was in the present, yet he impulsively resolved he would at this moment leave her for ever should his dread of rivalry be verified. How could he arrive at this most important knowledge at this crucial moment of early acquaintance? By what test could he learn had he a rival?

The young man went to the cage, as he remarked that birds were 'innocent toys.' The young actress was using a foot-rule to measure the proportions of the cage, to enable her to cut the baize covering she was hastening to make. He might render her assistance, and gauge her

heart at the same time; he would try, though he felt diffident, and conscious of this weakness.

'Your birds look very happy, Miss Verge. Are they Chinese?'

'I should say first cousins,—Japanese. Dear little things, are they not? and so tame. I let them fly out of their cage, and they make a tree of me,—perch on my arms and hands and shoulders, they even mount the highest branch, for I often put their daintiest food on the crown of my head, and they are clever in finding out a *bonne bouche*. Do you like birds?'

'Yes, very much,' replied the would-be Romeo.

The gauge of his heart was easily taken on that score. He hesitated to touch on another subject, and Miss Vera noted the inches measured, as well as the silence that existed. She broke the silence by saying,—

'I like men to like birds. I like all pets; dogs are my special weakness, but a marmoset is perfect. I have two such chilly dears; I have them in my snug room, wrapped in flannel, dear pets! Such lovely eyes, and little earrings in their ears—so sweet! and they are so happy together. They were sent me from Turkey, anonymously—so strange! I cannot slight my pets; and I find marmosets and live birds are *bona peritura*, so I give them a warm covering to save them. Vicissitudes of many

sorts may beset my children during their long journey.'

Miss Verge talked rapidly of her pets as she measured her baize; when she had finished her task, her visitor continued the coversation, in view of probing Truth to quiet his fears.

'So you think your birds will like the country, and that you will not, Miss Verge?'

'A life must be lived before we can judge how well or ill it suits one's disposition. I have never passed any length of time in the country.'

The man's earnestness overcame his diffidence, and he dashed at his point recklessly; be the result agreeable or disagreeable, he desired to learn it without delay.

'When a young girl accepts a golden cage, and changes her name, she generally anticipates happiness.' He pushed his sentence further, and asked a direct question, 'Is this not the usual hope, Miss Verge?'

Through the bars of the bird-cage he met the startled glance and confused countenance of the pretty actress, as she caught the inquiring gaze of the handsome Romeo, and she said,—

'Possibly you are right.' Then her woman's wit told her she was misleading her Romeo, and she added quickly,—'But I have not accepted a golden cage. My name Verge, I am told, is but a *nom de guerre*, and can be changed twenty times a year; but I have

no wish to take any other. When I have that wish, I shall naturally hope that happiness may follow; but—but—'

'But? What would you say? Is fancy free, and heart whole, Miss Verge, and the companion of the golden cage unchosen?' asked the visitor, in accents of earnest inquiry.

His happiness hung on her answer, he had known her in his dreams so long, and loved her so well.

'What would I say? Simply this,' said the pretty actress archly,—'that I think I have not given reason to be questioned on such a subject by a stranger, and my idea is that a stranger is somewhat inquisitive. Pardon me,—I am outspoken.'

The man's earnestness now sunk again into diffidence. He felt he had gone too far; he was silent under the smart lash, and would have been more cast down had he not caught the soft, fond, dreamy look in the hazel eyes under the golden eyelashes, that were not now seen through the bars of the bird-cage, but cast full on him; and if there was language in them, it was the language of love.

He read them right, and took courage again.

'May I ask, without offence, to what country you go, and even why you go away, yet prefer a London life?'

A sigh escaped the actress's lips, a gloom came over her face; she plied her scissors according to her ruled measurement and cut the baize, as she said,—

'To answer all your questions would doom you to too long a story. I will tell you. My home will be in Westmoreland,—no gilded cage, but a tiny cottage near Lake Windermere. It is at the wish of my uncle that I leave London and my profession. *Ennui* will be my enemy in the country.' With the energy of sudden temper, she added, as she stopped plying her scissors,—'It is a shame! The grass has been cut under my feet; to-night is the last time I shall act. I cried last night bitterly, when I heard how I had been disposed of in the future,—without consulting me too! or making me conversant of the plans proposed. Even the money is paid that will release me from my engagement with Mr Capias.'

The young girl was led away from caution by her feeling of injury, and spoke to the stranger as she might to her confidential friend, without suspecting that she was guilty of indiscretion; though she had only numbered seventeen summers, yet she might have been at that age more discreet in tongue.

'Your mother and father are your natural guardians, Miss Verge.'

This remark reminded the young actress that

her intended confidant was indeed a stranger to her, and she reflected a minute, looked wistfully into his open, handsome face, and decided she would trust him,—tell him the cause of her trouble, and relieve her mind in disburdening it, though she had chid her visitor when she felt he scrutinised her too keenly. When is youth consistent?

'You know little of me or mine. I and my mother live here, my father I never knew; he died in my infancy, and my mother's brother rules me in his stead. My mother obeys him as an oracle, though he lives miles and miles away, somewhere as wild and as secluded as Siberia. It is my uncle's wish that I should leave the stage; his reason is as ludicrous as his style of argument is fallacious. Forsooth! I lose in reputation—though I gain in money. My uncle delayed his departure so long last evening, and made the time pass so unheeded, that my mother failed to be with me at the usual hour. I have been so sad—so very sad, since I heard how that delayed time was employed. The decision arrived at is unalterable. My uncle left England this morning, or possibly I could have coaxed him over to suit my views, though I have never seen him in my life.'

'In truth, it is not well to be gazed on, applauded, or hissed, at the caprice of London sightseers. Greater refinement exists in the

retirement of country life. Your uncle is right, you will gain much in position.'

The handsome Romeo felt that the way was already smoothed over that would enable him in time to make his confession of love, and that the union of the families Montague and Capulet might be cemented amicably when the actress ceased to act, and the name of Verge had dropped out of the mind of the public, though on the eve of its possessor becoming famous.

'Living in idleness in the country will never make me a duchess. Does prejudice make an actress's station in society so low that she need be ashamed of her profession? A profession I have loved so well, and been so proud to follow. Do *you* think this?'

'Do I think it?' repeated the Romeo thoughtfully to his Juliet; 'in part I do. Yet I admit a good actress must be a woman of some talent. Thus she is above the commonality who form her audience and admire her gifts. I do not admit that her position is low.' Still more thoughtfully he added,—'The actress loses much as a woman. A girl of talent in the country would find a select circle of friends of fitting quality who might be counted under ten, but who would prize her more than the millions who gaze on her as a nine days' wonder.'

'Did you so gaze on me when I thought you criticised me?' asked Miss Verge, with a fasci-

nating *insouciance* that captivated by its simple witchery.

A sense of his illogical conclusions came quickly to her Romeo's mind. Night after night had he gazed on the clever actress, yet no other being was to admire her, or be gratified by the pleasure her beauty and just rendering of natural emotions inspired; he alone was to be her admirer. This argument was absurd, unfair, actuated by jealousy—jealousy born of love, truly, yet jealousy, and he would be swayed by justice and truth; and to his keen inquirer he desired to give a logic criticism of her true position with him,—one that his manly taste and judgment could accept, and gain her to accept also. Why disguise the truth? Why tie a knot by obscure utterances when a clear sentence would put both Romeo and Juliet on a proper footing? Had he gazed on her as a nine days' wonder? And he asked himself another question. Was he the only man actuated by a deeper passion than admiration of her? He wished to make strong his present position. He was profoundly sincere in his love; he would be tender with the young girl, and if pathos in words could draw her nearer him, he would use such means.

'I gazed on you, Miss Verge, not as a nine days' wonder, but as a miser gazes on his treasure—as his life's chief blessing. For weeks, nay months, I have lived on one hope.

The memories associated with you were ever constant, daily filling my mind; each throb of my pulse has been heightened or lowered as I hoped or despaired that the time might come that I could speak these words to you.' The stranger paused. The young actress was mute, caused by surprised emotions raised suddenly. The stranger continued, — 'I have courted solitude that I might recall the worth of words and sentiments that you have made me conscious of,—to remember the noble way you have studied to portray and raise mind above matter. Miss Verge, you have led me high above weak prejudices. I have not thought of you as a nine days' wonder,—as the actress who repeated well the thoughts of others, but I have studied you indeed critically. I have found you grasp the subtle fineness of your author's grandest thoughts, and depict them only as a high intelligence could have mastered. Thus rendered, you have added a greatness to words possibly undreamed of by their author; by this, the loftiness of your mind has been proved to me.'

The stranger stopped again in his rhapsody.

The young actress said timidly,—

'I think you flatter me above my merit. I have always wished to act up to the height of my ability: I have been but an actress. I could not have suggested one line I uttered.'

The word actress seemed to kindle the man's ire; he said quickly,—

'But an actress! Sneers and petty spite may cast disparagement on a worthy profession; some people there are who treat it with cold indifference. Wrongly biassed minds regard theatres as pernicious and demoralising, actors as men to be elbowed out of all well-conducted households. Such tenets were imbued into my training. I have lived to see the error and ignorance existing in such opinions, and to know the stage may be made the source of much good, and an incitant to noble actions by worthy actors and actresses. How much I respect the actress.' The stranger paused. The effect of the beautiful girl, in the spring-time of youth, led him to be more courageous and to speak openly, and leave his prologue, by which he was endeavouring to render intelligible the cause of his admiration of her, and when he spoke again it was with an abruptness, rapidity, and warmth of tone disclosing his long-pent affections. 'Miss Verge, I have loved you in dream as deeply as ever a pure woman was loved by man; but now that I have touched your hand, the dream becomes reality, and love will grow deeper, if that be possible, if we cease to be strangers.'

A slight pause followed, as the Romeo advanced a few steps nearer his Juliet, and

stopping within a few yards' length of her, he said, with a tremor in his voice,—

'How great will be my joy if you will admit me into your gilded cage as your chief and choicest pet.'

Miss Verge had listened to love sentences all fiction and froth—her heart had never fluttered as now. Had she shown coyish shyness, and been awkward, and in tame language rebuked her too precipitant and earnest lover, and returned him to his natural diffidence, it is possible the love for his ideal might have vanished at the moment, to return only as it had so long existed, in dreams and imaginary illusions.

She felt the man loved her, she doubted not one word he uttered. Love abrogated time; less than an hour sufficed to engender a mutual sympathy one with the other, and she answered him softly,—

'We are strangers,—unknown to each other even in name. This is all too sudden. What can I say?'

'My name is Athelstan Morgane; and yours?'

'Vera,' she murmured, as her soft eyes met his, with the tenderness and holy expression of a first love beaming in them; rendering still more attractive the freshness of early womanhood, and leaving no doubt in their answer to

the appealing look of tenderness as the man, who had now awoke from dreams, gazed on the object of his admiration.

'Vera, summon me to the country. What happiness to leave London and the dusty muslin flowers I have seen you sometimes toy over on the stage. Let us walk over true violets and primroses in the country together.'

'Can I? Could I invite you? Will my mother let me?'

Athelstan looked thoughtful a minute, then said quickly,—

'Your mother is known to me, Vera. I have watched your exit too well and too often not to know your guardian. May I watch you again, this, your last night? Will you recognise me, and introduce me to your mother? Leave the rest to me.'

Ever inconsistent youth! The declaration had been all too sudden; yet but a few minutes later Vera rashly approves the time and place of meeting.

She hangs on her lover's words that he over and over again repeats, without being conscious of reiteration, as he wearies not of his subject—that is, of love and happiness. His cup of success had intoxicated him; his imaginative nature was elated; his dream of hope was shaped into substance. The music of words, the sight of peaceful beauty, made him reckless

of the dregs of bitterness that might be added to his cup on the morrow.

No fears of the inscrutable future whispered evil doubts to clash against the will and happy tenor of the lover's mind. The demon Caste did not rise before him to be resisted and fought against and crushed by logic. His love had made him wild and forgetful,—forgetful of all but that he loved, and that his love had called forth reciprocal love from one whom to live near and idolise would be the realisation of a hope long and silently cherished.

The prospect of Vera's country residence was now no longer likened to a desert. Fresh imaginary roses sprung up in an oasis that were unknown to have had existence. She had played love often, but to be the object of earnest, honest love was a new emotion bewilderingly sweet. She had fascinated a lover whom nature had blessed with many charms. Her beauty had fascinated many, but her own heart had been unscathed, though her pride had been flattered by acknowledged conquests; but now began a fresh era with her; she loved impulsively but sincerely, and was proud of the man she loved.

CHAPTER III.

LAKE WINDERMERE.

'I trust thee from my soul, O Mary, dear,
But, ofttimes when delight has fullest power,
Hope treads too lightly for herself to hear,
And doubt is ever by until the hour;
I trust thee, Mary, but till thou art mine,
Up from thy foot unto thy golden hair,
Oh, let me still misgive thee and repine,
Uncommon doubts spring up with blessing rare!

Thine eyes of purest love give surest sign,
Drooping with fondness, and thy blushes tell
A flitting tale of steadiest faith and zeal;
Yes I will doubt—to make success divine!
A tide of summer dreams, with gentlest swell,
Will bear upon me then, and I shall love most well!'

Sonnet—CHARLES TENNYSON.

THE young actress was charmed with the novelty of her new retreat. How beautiful was the lake, with its green fells so picturesque and bright; how sweet the stillness and solitude. The hush

that reigned around her made her own step all too loud and harsh that broke the silence; she loved to roam and enjoy the quietude of hill and dale, of lake and wood, alone.

Such sentiments Vera breathed into her mother's ear.

'So, my child, you find it no hardship to leave the merriment and gay company you loved so well in London and hide your beauty away to be seen only by the ploughboy and peasant. I feared you were not fitted to like the country, and would ever look on your uncle as unjust and severe in placing you here.'

'A woman, dear mother, can fit herself to anything. In London I fancied I had not courage to walk through a country lane, but here I find I have courage to walk, row, or ride alone, and no place is dull enough to cause me the fear I dreaded would destroy my pleasure.'

'I am glad, my child, for I am in life's third season, and could not always be your companion in long rambles. May your whim always fit you to enjoy the country, for our tent may be pitched here for life.'

Poor woman! How much of the future was hidden from her as she spoke her thoughts with a foreign accent. Vera loved her rambles; but there was another who loved to ramble too,—who loved loneliness, except when he chanced to meet her and made her his companion. Then,

in the midst of the wild and grand solitude of nature, with freedom given to speech and action, and not within earshot or ken of inquisitive eye, and no law to rule, save that of love and honour, would Athelstan whisper, in a spellbound ear, in honied words, how his dreary world had been rendered paradise by the presence of an Eve—that no other woman lived in the wide world for him but Vera. And Vera believed him, and believed she was fitted to be companion for life to a man who talked like a poet, and dreamed of future joys culled far from gay cities, and could be happy in a cottage by the margin of a lovely lake.

Madame Verge had smiled when she saw the time Vera spent over her toilette, and asked her if it were to please the ploughboys. But Vera had a woman's vanity; and not far off was another being who had been equally scrupulous to assume a captivating exterior that he considered due to his position. He had a man's love of admiration, and of appearing his best, when admiration was to be raised in the opposite sex; and he desired to look well before his best beloved. He had often smiled at woman's vanity and weakness, but, like many men, forgotten his own.

This day Athelstan had an object in trying art to heighten his power of fascination. Among his friends he had heard Miss Verge eulogised,

her place of retirement had become known, and hints were made that intrusion on her retreat was likely to follow this knowledge, and her quietude to be interrupted by admirers, whom it would pain him to know were allowed entrance to the gilded cage he so jealously watched; and some of the intruders were handsome, wealthy, and well born.

Athelstan wore a fisherman's costume, and had rod in hand; his face was smileless as that of a fish waiting to be captured, his mind more agitated than a fish's mind (should a fish have one) could be, even when furiously wriggling, caught in a torturing net, with freedom lost for ever, and desperately endeavouring to regain it.

Vera did not fail to observe that Athelstan was less buoyant in spirit, and more absorbed in thought, and almost silent, as he walked with her to the fishing-punt, that was close to the edge of the water.

He seated her comfortably, wrapped her carefully with plaids to protect her from strong breezes, and placed rugs for her feet; he took the fish-basket and bait from his servant's hand, dismissed him, and punted the boat to the point he desired.

He baited Vera's line, then his own; he looked wistfully, then vacantly, at his float; he caught nothing, whilst Vera landed perch after

perch, gudgeon and dace, that began to make a goodly heap of glistening spoil.

'Athie, you let the bites pass, or your hook is not baited; or why do the fish prefer my line?'

'Because beauty holds the rod and is at peace, dear.'

'Athie, we have outlived flattery. It is four months since we first met, and you told me I was as beautiful as Venus, and I said you were a handsome Adonis. That was when we only knew each other's external merits. Now, dear Athie, I know your disposition, your bent of mood, and depth of mind, and I am sure you are one wee bit miserable and abstracted. I believe you have no bait on your hook,—nibbled off, or never put on. Let me look.'

'You have a quick eye, Vera.'

'And brain too. Tell me what annoys you.'

'Do you know a man named ——?'

'Hush, Athie. Do not let a sombre reverie overtake you about any Brummagem lover of mine. All girls flirt, dear, many times, but love once. Surely you know who is my love. Do you doubt still that truth? Look in my face and tell me.'

'No, Vera, I trust you implicitly, but—'

'After that, no more buts. Let me look at your hook.'

'We will give up fishing, and talk awhile,

Vera. I have a difficult proposition to make to you, who are so frank and true, and hate dissembling. I shall despise myself when I make it, but make it I must. It will prove your strength of love and trust in me, as you accept or reject it.'

So no more gudgeon, perch, dace, or trout were added to the fish-basket that day. The rods were placed in their cases, as Athelstan thought over how to break to Vera his plan for the future, *for which he was fully prepared.* He paved his way with suitable preamble, then a propositional event was suggested. After some smart fencing in words, attack, and parrying, the proposition was accepted, and, with the full knowledge of error on one side, and ignorance on the other, the plan was to be carried into effect the following day. Then Athelstan and Vera left the punt, to wend their steps to the cottage by the lake. Arriving at the cottage, they seated themselves under the broad antique porch, which had in past times served as the resting-place of lovers, who were now sleeping in their long rest under the trees that grew luxuriantly in the churchyard surrounding the village church, the high square tower of which marked the solemn, calm spot, and was seen from the porch. Leading to this cemetery on the forest border, were glens that served as pathways to peasants far and near. In the deep

hush of the stillness that reigns in so fit a spot that is a place of rest after long toil and busy world work, there is a beautiful, sad tranquillity that invites reflection. Each life now ended had fashioned and worked out its course; each course differed. Many generations slept there in peace while their children's children told the same old tale that was told years ago by some of them, even under the spacious antique porch of the cottage by the lake, where Vera and Athelstan are fashioning their lives.

Now a mother joins the lovers. She believes they met perchance. Athelstan offered her his day's sport, though each fish had chosen Vera's hook and bait to be caught by. Later in the day he partook of the spoil, at Madame Verge's invitation; and though much conversation followed during the time devoted to enjoying it, the event planned for the morrow remained *sub silentio.*

CHAPTER IV.

NOT GREEN.

'Places of nestling green, for poets made.'
Story of Romini.

HOW happily passed the time at the cottage by the lake. Athelstan visited it frequently, and he met others there on whom he looked no longer with an eye of jealousy. Vera left them to her mother's care, and was solicitous only that his amusements should be enhanced. To him she gave her time, and marked him her chief friend among her friends; and in the course of a few months many of her London friends found no beauty in the lake cottage, nor in the scenery, that was now too tame, nor even in the late actress, and their visits became less frequent, then ceased.

Athelstan was content, and approved Vera's ways, and his mind was at peace. In the

midst of this peacefulness, he was called away to be with his father in London.

During his absence, an elderly, handsome man, with a sedate countenance and the clear stamp of a Londoner, strolled up the cottage garden. As he continued his course, he regarded with much attention the picturesqueness of the old worn cottage and well-kept flower-beds, that gave forth the sweet scent of mignonette and wallflower; the choicer hyacinth and heliotrope too added strength to the perfume and colouring to the picture—for picture it was—of rural loveliness.

The cottage suggested no cause for remark, as it differed little from many other simple cottages of white, rough stone that existed all over the land, but the elderly gentleman paused often as he scrutinised this simple dwelling, that was only conspicuous in extreme neatness and in its trim and well-tended garden. He came nearer, and conned over the unique appendants and ornamental attractions the cottage possessed, the antique carved porch and finely-carved window frames. He plucked grapes from the vine, that was marked by the finger of Time, and for many years had adorned, as a coping, the bay window it was trained to surround, and it mantled the side of the cottage with graceful clusters of tiny grapes and leaves of soft green.

When under the antique porch he came to his last grape he threw the stalk away. Yet he lingered still, and turned from the cottage and looked on the view that gave the lake, seen through a vista of high trees, and beyond the ha-ha that divided the grounds of the cottage from the public thoroughfare. He satisfied himself that the view was pretty. He turned again. What more had he to notice? He had well surveyed the exterior of the cottage,—taken note of the lace curtains being uniform in hanging and manner of crossing the windows, and colour of bands that held them in position, that gave an effect the elderly gentleman could not approve.

'Pretty,' he mentally decided; 'but a cottage remote from a roadway, buried among birds and squirrels, made all an unnecessary extravagance—all was vanity!'

Still the elderly gentleman hesitated. At length he drew himself up to the last fraction of an inch of his height, that might measure two inches over six feet, and with a swelling chest and upright back he strode on and rang the cottage bell. The peal startled him that rung from under a housing of wood that sheltered the loud-tongued monster bell that hung near the porch. The same bell-pull shook a weaker-sounding bell inside the house, that brought several dogs to the porch in full cry,

as they struggled to pass the door that was ajar, and which they flung wide open to welcome the expected visitor. Following them was the radiant Vera, anticipating, like the dogs, Athelstan's visit; a cursory glance sufficed to tell her she did not know the figure under the porch. She called her boisterous pets, and turned into the room over which the vine clustered shading the window, and in which her mother sat.

A few minutes later the visitor, grand in gait, entered the room, his composure regained, after the uncivilised noise and hubbub, for he had been long used to the musical tingling of electric bells, and dogs that were trained never to accost a stranger unless called by name.

The stranger introduced himself by presenting a card to Madame Verge of a mutual friend (now this elderly gentleman could with ease tell a fib, if to his advantage), and he explained the object of his visit was to gain information for this friend of a Mr Caston, whom he understood was uncle to Miss Verge. He laid great emphasis on the relationship.

'I know the name of Caston,' replied Madame Verge, with great hesitation, and a common topic of conversation sprung up between the trio.

Their discourse was carried on in a trivial

vein, yet under that covering the man formed sentences that unveiled to him knowledge that the most reserved might have given without suspecting that the cool and careless exterior covered a subtle desire and intense longing to worm out secrets for his own purpose, and that he hid strong emotion and acute interest when his smile was bland, his accents artless, and words fluent.

Oh, that Athelstan could have possessed the mirror that Merlin constructed for King Ryence. Yet it would not have secured him happiness, nay, it would have greatly marred his peace, had the vision been reflected on its surface, that would have told a clear tale, as he was trying to conjecture how the cottagers at Lake Windermere were passing their time, whilst he was putting the finishing touches to his toilet before escorting his mother to Exeter Hall.

An oratorio, given during an afternoon, enabled a woman of such a pious mind as Athelstan's mother to return to her peaceful home before Erebus reigned and the gas lights allowed wicked abuses of time and pleasure, and drew Arcadian nightingales together to bray to music words of light import, and create a love of gaiety and mirth that was all in discord with the sobriety of a well-conducted life. Yet whilst it was day—hearken—the same throats would be the organs to swell forth full notes in words of

holy import, whether of prayer or praise, that fell on the ear only as a well-executed solo, duet, or chorus, often with no prayer or praise felt in the heart of the hearer, nor in that of the singer. Still the pious woman enjoyed contentment in seeming good, and this good consisted only in listening to the performance of an oratorio rather than an opera.

So little quiets the conscience, let that little be still unction to the souls that feel benefited under the influence.

Athelstan was bound, as an act of duty, to accede to the request of his mother, and remain in London whilst Vera was on the tiptoe of expectation that he would meet her at his usual hour. Without Merlin's mirror, how could Athelstan foresee the future that awaited him, not seeing the present. He, too, was blind and contented; he, too, quieted his conscience, having confidence in present security that could not in the future be weakened. Vain man! how little he knew of the fence that was being raised for him to encounter, and put him to a standstill, or force him to leap into unknown ground.

The elderly gentleman carried a cheerful countenance when about to leave Vera and her mother, whom he treated with marked gallantry. He felt he lost nothing by his urbane manner. He, too, was contented with the phase of deception he had practised; he would profit by it,—

rescue the innocent from the guilty; he was satisfied, and placed this unction to his soul, that the end sanctified the means, and at all times the innocent should triumph over designing schemers.

He refused all the hospitable offers that were pressed on him as his due, he being Mr Caston's friend. Wine was a beverage he eschewed, but he owned he had unscrupulously robbed his new friends of a bunch of grapes—that would suffice for refreshment until he reached Ambleside, to which place he was bound.

'I have always hesitated even to eat them; —so small, can they be good? I thought they were grown because they looked pretty,' said Vera carelessly.

'The life of an actress causes her to think only of exterior beauty, effect, and illusion, until even the juicy grape is looked on as a mere ornate adjunct, without the invigorating power of sustaining life. Possibly fermented into wine, the juice would be rendered acceptable to Miss Verge; and such grapes are made into wine to tempt the unwary into fascinating snares.' Without waiting Vera's reply, the guest continued in a pompous voice, as if addressing someone whose education in the tenets of religion and morality, possibly, had been neglected:—'Miss Verge, there is a fountain to which, I hope, you sometimes have put your

lips, and drawn from it water that for ever quenches thirst and satisfies.'

'I have never heard of it: is it near here? After violent exercise, and much talking, what a godsend not to be thirsty, nor to have a parched throat.'

As her guest had been facetious, Vera fancied there was a *double entendre* in his last remarks; but he had weighed her in *his* balance, and found her wanting.

'Miss Verge,' he said, 'reflect; the morrow will come, and you may not be here.'

'What! leave this cottage, so pretty and snug, so suddenly? What a cruel hint to make.'

'Sad, sad,' sighed the man, in a murmur, as he thought the girl a pretty heathen; and though he drew himself up to his greatest height again, he bent his lofty mind so low as to endeavour to be jocose, and said,—'My pretty lass, spare me a few flowers—a little button-hole—and then I shall say adieu reluctantly, for the hour I have passed with you I shall reckon important in my life.'

There seemed much meaning marked in these words.

He took his leave of Madame Verge, and with a bland smile, that seemed induced by a natural, merry humour, turned to Vera.

'Come, lassie, let me choose my flowers.'

Vera and her new friend passed out into the garden.

'I will choose that small moss-rose just tipped with colour, because it blushes covertly, and has within its mossy bands the full rose of love yet undeveloped, emblem of a fair girl like you; and that golden heart's ease I will ask for, that I may be mindful that with love yellow-eyed jealousy is seldom absent; so I must repeat my visit to the lass of Windermere at no long interval of time.'

Vera held the flowers, smiling merrily as she put them in form, and kept up a spirit of play as she said,—

'I will add another emblem, not of myself, for it is green. To love-passages I think I give full value when I compare them to weeds: they grow apace, but die soon. See this weed, this wild grass and its light seed, I add to remind you I am not quick to believe all light flattery to be sober truth. Look, it accords well with rosebud and pansy, and makes the bouquet complete; accept it as a parting gift from one who is not green.'

'Say kinder words, or kiss the flowers; just one kiss, after so many that you have wasted on the stage, will not be difficult.'

'You insult the actress,—one, who, to please the frivolous, or amuse the thinking, has tested her powers to make fictitious love appear real,

and now will give a lesson, by the way, from which you may profit,—that which is suited to the stage is all unsuited to real life. But I will kiss your flowers; and more, I will fasten them in your coat, when sweetened with fictitious love by my kiss. Now, when will you come again? —to-morrow, before these flowers fade, that carry love with them?'

Vera laughed a low, smothered laugh, as she fastened the small cluster of flowers in her visitor's coat.

'Not to-morrow. Ere long you will hear of me.'

With a majestic gait the elderly man walked out of the garden into the public thoroughfare. By weights of his ideal gravity he had weighed Vera, and had, with satisfaction, proved her worthless. He was deceived in her, and how greatly was she deceived in him.

'Vera, my love, I scarcely remember if that man's name is Scott Gordon, or Gordon Scott. I have looked through our London Directory, and see no such name; neither do I see his card about,' said Madame Verge, when Vera returned with her many pet dogs, that she fondled and kissed in turn.

'He may be only a shopkeeper, mother. I quite forget his name. He jumbled so many together—friends of friends—I could not distinguish his own. But it signifies little; he

was delightful company whilst he was with you, but the old boy tried his wits to raise a little flirtation when alone with me. Should he come again, Scott or Gordon, I shall not be at home. If you see him, let this suffice, that you know I refuse to see him.'

'Vera, my child, I considered you incautious; you spoke too much of your early life, forgetting you addressed a stranger.'

'Too much! I am sorry. The old man was so interested in all I said, and I really thought he was an old family friend, yet unknown to us. Now, I will call my doggies—give the long coats a swim in the lake, and those that prefer to paddle shall keep to the margin; and if I should accidentally meet Athelstan, mother dear, may I invite him to dinner?'

'My dear, he is too frequent in his visits.'

'I may not meet him, mother; but if I should, dear mother? We must lodge him in this out-of-the-way place, for you gave him a general invitation. You see the fish are more numerous just here than in any other part of the lake, and he generally chooses a spot near here to fish.'

'A strange coincidence; but let it pass, Vera. I will accompany you to-day, and be amused by the dogs' play too. Come Reni, Dürer, Francisca, all come to bathe.'

No. Athelstan would not have been pleased

had he had Merlin's mirror, nor at his ease had he known the result of his visit to Exeter Hall this day: a ruse of his father's to take him well out of his way for a time, to suit his own purpose.

CHAPTER V.

ARE THE BONDS OF MARRIAGE DISHONOURABLE?

'Intrigue is mere invention in men, an instinct in woman.'
STEELE.

'DO you know the town of Windsor, Athelstan?'

'How, father, could I avoid knowing it well,—as well as I do the Canterbury meadows? Was not Eton my first school?'

'I had quite forgotten that, my son.'

Athelstan, observing the silence that followed his father's remark—a remark as false as any man could utter—asked if any of his knowledge about the vicinity of Windsor would be useful to him.

'Is there good fishing in the Thames about there?'

'Some parts of the river first-rate;' and Athelstan continued with gusto, 'I could take

you near a weir where every fly would catch the eye of a good prize. My tackle is just now in perfect order; use it for an indefinite time, just as you may desire.'

'We might be companions in the sport; yet I think lake fishing is superior to river.'

'Oh, in the Scotch lakes: no one would wish better.'

'We need not go so far north as that. Is it good in Derwentwater?'

'Very fair.'

Athelstan saw not the drift of his father's remarks.

'Any lake better? Do you know Windermere?'

'I have heard of good sport there in the proper season.'

'Heard! But do you know of your own knowledge?'

Athelstan took his father's words *cum grano salis;* they might mean much or nothing.

A few strides took him to the window. He looked out, turned his back towards his father, as he answered,—

'Of my own knowledge good fishing is to be had there—at least it was years ago.'

'I have been to Lake Windermere lately. Do you know a cottage—a bijou residence—facing the lake, on the west, conspicuous from its elevated position—quite small? A retired

actress lives there. Did she happen to live there the last time you visited Windermere?'

'Possibly; but I do not recall any particular cottage. Windermere being a large lake, many retired actresses may choose to live on its banks when they become old ladies.'

'Never apply the word "lady" to an actress my son.'

'No; not when she is raised to be a duchess or countess, or any other title?' said Athelstan, with a malicious chuckle.

'Well, Athelstan, the actress is not old who lives now in the cottage; which you will remember, when I tell you Miss Verge lives there, and she had the boldness to ask me to call upon her. I saw her mother, on a business matter, at the cottage some months ago.'

'You did!'

Athelstan turned towards his father; an expression of strong indignation was visible in every feature of his face.

'Should I have asked your permission? All I wish you to know is that I saw Miss Verge.'

Mr Morgane looked hard into his son's face and as steadfastly his son looked into his. Not a word passed for many minutes. The father distrusted the son, no less did the son distrust the father. Each desired not to lose ground in choosing defence or attack. Athelstan waited

UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS LIBRARY

attack, and remained passive. His father repeated his question again.

'Should I have asked your permission?'

'Certainly not. You had business with Madame Verge. So far, she had the right to grant or refuse you an interview; and, naturally, if you called on the mother, you would gain an introduction to her daughter.'

'I wish you to hear my opinion of Miss Verge before I speak on other matters, and to warn you that though she converses pleasantly, there is an artful spirit in her. Her dress, studied even to the folds of her tucker, and her manners so coquettish that she would be dangerous if she came in contact with a youth unused to the snares of designing witchery; she disguises boldness under the aspect of easy indifference.'

'Oh!'

'I tested and probed her; I quoted to her religious sentences: no African in the remote centre of Africa could have shown greater ignorance. I tried her, and tremble for her future. But when I touched on frivolities—when I played the gallant, I found her Zuleika in truth. From my youth upwards, I always avoided a garden of Adonis. I never valued the flotsam and jetsam of the wrecked love of a madcap when wafted to land near me; and I curbed the actress in her sensational attack. I allowed her to kiss the flowers that she gave me

as a parting gift, but I was thankful when I passed the precincts of the grounds and was in the public road, after she told me she was not green. My son, could a lady have used such a word? I probed that girl deep to the heart, and I found the core bad.'

Athelstan turned white, red, livid in turn. He spoke no word of rage or surprise; his brows were knit into a scowl; his eyes were bright, and resembled the glare of a tiger's; his hand clenched in rage, if not in menace. The hot, fierce blood, as of a savage, seemed to be roused into intensity that almost defied restraint to cool it to the temperature that was needed to ensure reasonable politeness.

'Father, is it true you saw Miss Verge? Miss Verge is a character unfitted to your delineation. Miss Verge would have spurned your gallantry,—would have politely snubbed you.'

'Sir!'

The defiant tone of this word enraged Athelstan beyond control. He said, with malicious firmness, and with more of his natural spirit and courage than he had ever shown when addressing his father,—

'You are adroit in spreading a net over your victims. You first throw over your net so finely it is not seen or felt; then you entangle your prey, and the victim wonders how and from

what source the entanglement comes, and looks in vain for it; then the net is pulled tighter, and the victim is bound fast. These are strange words for me to utter,—strange for you to hear, but I come straight to the point and face your attack. What net have you thrown over Miss Verge? For months she has been much annoyed, and her footsteps dodged.'

Mr Morgane was passionless now; his rage found vent in the single word he had spoken. He waved his hand as a sign of silence to his son, and said,—

'My good son, let your net question die a natural death. I avoid controversy, particularly when garbled and in obscure language. I have the duty of a parent to perform, and a right to net you, or Miss Verge, if good comes from it. I told you I passed into the public road, but I watched Miss Verge from there. Surrounded by dogs, she and her mother went to the lake. Miss Verge had no thought of filial duty. Leaving her mother to walk on the bank alone, she took a boat and sculled herself—a most unfeminine proceeding—and after a while two men, scarcely clothed paddled, towards her in canoes. Water carries sound clearly, and boisterous was the meeting. The half-nude men, who would have been hooted in London, lashed their canoes together, and Miss Verge gave up sculling, and

the men seated themselves in her boat and rowed, towing their canoes with a scarf that she gave them for a towing-rope. Extravagant minx! Verily I tremble for her future! Frankly, for months I own I have set people to watch her, which was equivalent to setting a watch on you. I now caution you to be prudent whilst you can retrace your steps and become—'

'Your words would be strong enough to turn the sea's tide, if they influenced my principles of duty. If you defame a girl, do so with discretion when you speak of her to her husband! I wish, father, to treat you with all respect, yet I must defend my wife against slander, and uphold her even though I cease to—'

'That woman your wife!' Mr Morgane said, as he shook with suppressed passion from head to foot. He had tutored and tortured his sentences cautiously so as not to tell direct lies, now he spoke boldly out. 'I can never own her as my daughter! A creature who has been on the boards of a vile theatre since the age of four years old, and not ashamed to own that at that young age she appeared as Cupid, winged and bedizened! Gloried, too, in telling me she repeated eight lines of poetry quite outspoken, and remembered well the applause, that frightened her, for she mistook it for thunder, but

her courage never left her; and that she stood stock-still, made her bow, as she had been taught to do at rehearsals. From that day, she had the audacity to say she had grown into an actress, and her talents had made her the pet of many. The woman is worthy her infancy, —and that woman you bring to my family, and give her my name, and vainly think I shall look on her as my daughter—a woman who has no retiring modesty,—able to face the gaze of thousands unmoved! This woman to be called my daughter? Preposterous!'

'Father, I listen to you because no third party is present, and because you are my father.'

'Ah, that is a serious question!' said Mr Morgane thoughtfully.

'It is. I feel its importance. Let us, as father and son, speak on an unalterable event calmly.' Mr Morgane winced as though pained. Athelstan continued, 'See my wife again. Spies misinform you. Believe her to be *sans reproche.* She has lived but seventeen years—'

'Never, never, my poor boy. Why did you put your foot inside so vile a place as a theatre?'

'Why did you make me acquire a love for the drama, by leading me to appreciate the beauties of Shakespeare? Did you not teach

me yourself, and encourage me in my taste?'

'For your improvement in elocution, to prepare you for the pulpit or Parliament; that was no good reason that you should frequent low amusements. Besides, there is a mystery about Miss Verge, and a mystery always hides a crime or wrong.'

Mr Morgane shuddered, and his features worked painfully.

'I know no mystery in Miss Verge.'

'She told me she had never seen her father, yet her mother dates his death some ten years ago; a strange lapse of memory, when at the age of four the daughter remembers repeating eight lines of poetry. My son, look well into this, there may be—there must be—a flaw in the marriage contract, and all yet may be well.'

'Impossible,' said Athelstan firmly. 'A flaw!'

'Quite possible, even probable.' Mr Morgane's voice became husky. He regained his self-possession, and continued calmly,—'The fascination of a lovely woman is a spell upon you; under a winning duplicity that appears like love, you love in return perhaps truly, but so influenced by cunning artifices that you fail to see rightly your position.'

'I think not. Vera and I are married.'

'Poor boy! poor boy! How will she treat

her marriage vow? and when and where was that vow made?'

'In the heat of my defence of Vera I have already said too much.'

Athelstan became cautious.

'Too much in one sense, Athelstan, too little in another. Probably you intended to keep your marriage longer secret, but I having discovered your haunt, you have owned it in a bold, manly way; but you have forgotten every sixpence you spend is from me, and I have the right to withhold your allowance to the last sou rather than let you lead the life of a—a—'

'Married man,' suggested Athelstan. 'I do not question your right; all I ask of you is justice. If my marriage is an offence in your sight, I regret it, yet I fully cede to myself the right to marry when, and whom, I please.'

Athelstan maintained a hard, firm tone and manner that surprised his father, who had hitherto received servile obedience from him.

'Ceding so much, what is the justice you ask? That I should support your wife—an actress?'

'To be as good as your word. I spoke of my future once. You informed me you had ample wealth. I had but to enjoy life,—to follow the bent of my inclinations, whether to enter parliamentary life, or any other calling befitting the position of your only child.'

'I presumed you held fast to the principles of strict morality and refinement,—that you would uphold with honour the position inherited from me. At this moment I will not disown you. I will be just. You shall have an income, an income that will be sufficient for yourself; and when you see the dishonour of your life, and renounce it, the income shall be raised to the same that you have hitherto received. Athelstan, you have made a mistake.'

'Is that your justice? Are the bonds of matrimony dishonourable? Have you no soul? Can you not believe a lovely girl can excel even a dream of purity,—be holy as the angels, yet married secretly?'

'I daresay you are visionary enough to fancy you will dwell ever in Elysium,—that your angel's wing will never break, and she drop to foul earth herself. Truly, I have no soul to see good in evil, nor to encourage your error by a helping hand! Understand, your income is reduced from this day.'

'I understand perfectly you said so. Reflection may alter that unjust decision. Father, to you it may seem a commonplace act to compel me to accept a pittance that will cause misery. I have not prepared myself to follow any profession. I doubt if I am sharp enough to become a bookmaker.' Athelstan stopped abruptly, then continued,

with irony,—'You are loud in your praise of generous gifts, and repressing vice. You may on platforms hold forth on the theme of responsibilities that wealth entails on its possessor; you will head charity lists, to lure gold from others' coffers to swell a large sum total; you will try to make a lovely pose in the world as a bold designer of reforms good for the people's morals; and when you claim your coveted statue, see, it will commemorate a man who could not act justly towards a son who would not kneel to worship a golden calf of his father's setting up, and—'

'Do you fire that shot at Lady Clara? Foolish boy!'

'Interpret my words as you like, father, but the golden calf is the creature that comes between you and Vera,—robs you of wit, causes you to call her affection a dreamy folly, and to question her faith to her marriage vow. Inspired by the worship of that golden calf, looking at all things visionary that are not placed on the same altar, it would be useless to try to bring before your mind the happiness that accrues from the companionship of a worthy, talented wife. I have that happiness. I do not disguise that I am influenced. It is not by duplicity nor by a cunning artificer, but solely by Vera's fine spirit. Truly my wife sways and strengthens me. Her brain is a

cradle of wit and humour, stored with well learned and appreciated matter. This gives a tone of mind to her, a charm and fascination of more worth to me than if her fortune doubled that of Lady Clara, and her diamonds shone twice as bright. My Vera carries her diamonds in her bright eyes, full of mind; and her value above gold, in the worth of her words and disposition. She will face poverty boldly, though it will be hard for me to tell her how poor she may be.'

'You are too subtle for me to follow. I find nothing tangible in your many words; I will leave them unanswered. I fancy I shall make a greater impression on you by one simple question, than your inflated platitudes have on me. Who is that dark man dressed as a Parsee, who loiters near the cottage, and has more than once entered it? Is he a being disguised, or a genuine fire worshipper?'

'I have never met such a man at the cottage.'

'I suppose not. Now master for a moment your wild impulses and obstinacy, and look resolutely at that fact. Denude your idol of all her trappings and make her a woman, and ask her, or your common sense, who that distinguished man is? You know much of Windermere, yet I know more. Solve that mystery, and if the tale tells against the actress, remember this house is open to you. I shall

not despise you if she has outwitted you; she is clever, and you are under her spell, but if, now warned, you are her dupe, my forgiveness will be more tardy.'

'Parsee, Greek, or Arab! I believe a fiction haunts you, or some bitter malice prompts the tale.'

'It is false! I forgive the heat of passion and unbecoming words. I have said to my purpose: it is for you to act with prudence. I have shown patience towards you. The case is clear between us, and your actions must decide our future course. I go now to keep my appointment at the Scientific Institute, and shall not return home to dinner. Good-bye, my son, let me take your hand, whilst I have the hope that I have the power to separate Vera from you.'

'I withhold my hand, though I may make you my deadliest enemy.'

'Foolish lad! I will inform your mother of this *mésalliance*.'

'As you please; but I beg you to add I have preferred a *mariage d'inclination* to a *mariage de convenance*.'

A few minutes later Mr Morgane was irritated by his wife's plausible reasoning when she heard the news of Athelstan's secret marriage.

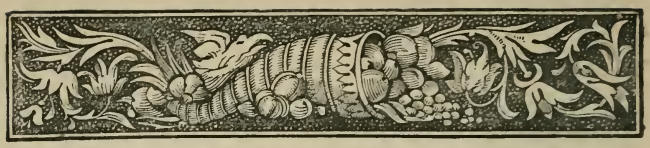
'Athelstan will be true to his wife, my dear. He is married; let us make the best of a bad

match. Let us not forget our own early days —how much we had to forgive each other.'

'Spare me and yourself—you know nothing of this matter; and cease to raise the ghost I strive to forget. Who is this Vera? Heavens! who is she?'

'I cannot tell you. I have but just heard her name.'

'I fear to have my suspicions verified. But enough! enough!'



CHAPTER VI.

RUPTURE.

'Hence loathed melancholy,
Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born,
In Hygian cave forlorn
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!
. . . . . .
But come, thou, Goddess, fair and free,
In Heav'n yclep'd Euphrosyne,
And by men, heart easing mirth.
. . . . . .
These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.'—*L'Allegro.* MILTON.

THE golden calf was above all, through all, and in all. Mr Morgane was influenced to worship it. It ruled his mind, and was the creature that made life tolerable; and as its weight increased, so it engendered increase of affection for itself, to the exclusion of all other objects worthy of it.

The calf worshipped was Mr Morgane's

handiwork; it was dear to him, and selfishly guarded. No event happened that he took cognisance of, unless the creature protruded its tiny horned head—it ruled over all. Words of eulogy, praise, or flattery were liberally bestowed to the glorification of this golden calf. Mr Morgane was insignificant without the creature of his idolatry, and he was proud being the owner of a talisman that gave him power, and brought worthy though weak men to sit at his footstool, and look up to him—the greater man.

When the charitable-with-other-people's-money applied to Mr Morgane to swell their funds, the golden calf rose up and demanded protection. It never heeded the lowing that came not from its parent, and the rich were often sent empty away.

The golden calf caused happiness, luxury, and mercy to abound, if the parent lowed forth the sound of command, that was never given in private. Among a multitude must it be heard, and the bellow wide and loud be echoed abroad that published in the face of day the charitable deed accomplished. Verily, Mr Morgane reaped his reward, and the poor, abject, and needy benefited. The owner of the golden calf received praise and glorification; and he fell to worship and idolise his treasure again and again.

The weighty golden calf brought responsibilities: it was a stern necessity, to be never lost sight of, that the successor to it should be worthy the possession of so valuable and pride-giving a creature. It was, above all things, imperatively necessary that he should profess and uphold high principles. He must make those his companions only who lead a sober life; he must in all things be in the world, but not of it; he must love virtue, and hate wine and all its attendant vices; he must ever have some *memento mori* to strike the eye or ear, if he had not the visible corpse present at every feast; he must reflect on the possibility that each day might be his last. His character must be sifted, and the attributes alone found must be holiness, wisdom, purity, and a sense of justice; failing one, the golden calf must be withheld, and not pass into the possession of a man unworthy by reason of lacking virtue and possessing vices.

Since Mr Morgane heard of Athelstan's marriage, painful surmises had arisen in his mind. The golden calf had become too weighty a responsibility to be handled lightly; it had become an incubus; it pressed so heavily that its suffocating influence made sleep a source of misery to its present possessor; starts and gasps awoke him to feel his misery acutely. What was to be done with this creature that once

formed a life's enchantment? Was it to carry ill fate with it, similar to the Nibelungen gold?

The golden calf was a theme that raised ire between Mr and Mrs Morgane. Her opinion was stereotyped and proof against any argument. Athelstan alone was worthy to possess it after her life interest had ceased. But Mr Morgane failed to see her capability to decide the momentous dispute, when she could not decide the more simple question of Vera's parentage. So much turned on this question; and Mr Morgane trembled under his perplexing difficulty. At length he formed a resolution jealously kept secret, and he became silent on the subject.

Then suspicions came to Mrs Morgane, and she dreaded that her husband would break faith with her, and not keep the promise made when he was a much poorer man.

The mother warned her son of danger. She advised him to decern how much to his advantage would be concession to his father's wishes,—that with caution and good management might be made. Rumours had been heard by his father; sift them; they might be true. For the sake of the golden calf the mother-in-law rose up against her daughter-in-law.

But Athelstan refused to sift rumours that

by sifting might raise a cloud of malicious slander to coil around her whom he had sworn to love, honour, and cherish, a coil thick enough to encompass her for life, and never be dispersed, notwithstanding her irreproachable purity.

'Henceforth,' Athelstan had vociferated, 'if my wife cannot be admitted into my family, and be recognised as her position demands, and my father cannot overcome his prejudice against her, then the family feud must be permanent!'

Mrs Morgane, knowing so much of matters of which Athelstan was in total ignorance, trembled for her son's prospects. She was unable to influence him. He would not regard her as the infallible oracle of Delphos; nor could she conciliate her husband's rage, which burned to a white heat, and was felt by all who came within range of his wrath. In a mood so irritable and petulant, a word might offend beyond the hope of pardon, therefore Athelstan avoided his father, and frequented Windermere.

In the delight of Vera's society, so much was present happiness, that Athelstan was oblivious of the danger of his secret. How could he tell her that his father despised her; that he had declared his marriage to him, and yet her own mother knew not their position? Mr Morgane's idolatry of his golden

calf was not greater than Madame Verge's of her only child.

Athelstan's home had been a house of sadness to him : he ever hailed the last day of his holidays as the bright day to take him to school. Assemblies were held in this sombre residence, but no light dance, no frivolity, no forgetfulness of the improvement of the moment was allowed; each moment brought its duty, which to neglect was counted a sin. It was a common sight to see black, white, and grey mingled together at these assemblies,—missionaries from every clime holding forth before many well-dressed people, who had been allured to the meeting by the announcement that some high dignitary would be present; but a letter of regret would invariably arrive, stating that severe catarrh or urgent business had prevented attendance. The letter would keep. When the worthy people who formed the assembly were marshalled in the rooms, and the demands made on their purses were generously met, then the disappointment of the 'lion's' non-appearance was made known. Good manners prevented the lion-hunters leaving; they could not retire gracefully, as the close proximity of the seats prevented the possibility of quitting one without causing general disturbance.

These meetings might lead up to good works, but all unsuited to a man of Athel-

stan's temperament, when never a rout, or carpet dance, played part at reasonable intervals—as comedy might in a tragedy.

Thus it was natural, as the dispositions of father and son were opposed in taste, that the son would be happy in the cottage at Windermere, whilst the father was entertaining his devotees in London. Athelstan chose to frequent the hilly country of Westmorland rather than his father's crowded, heated, brilliantly-lighted rooms, in which he fancied he detected piety and hypocrisy blended.

He felt a truer piety in the soothing influence that stole over him in the bright starlight walks near the lake, with the odours of night-scented flowers, and the quiet sound of the little ripples of water that kissed the edge of a jutting bank and glided on to kiss another. Athelstan was often alone when he heard this soft sound: it was peaceful to his ear and mind; and no golden calf came before his eyes to harass him; nay, he felt the influence of the goodness of the Creator, in that the poor and rich alike have the grand canopy of the stars; the poor and rich alike have all the beauties of nature open before them to enjoy, and the stern requirements of nature need no luxuries.

Athelstan argued thus within himself, and wished he had been born an Arab, living a free life, hampered by no rule or precedence;

will and humour only his dictators of life's day.

Athelstan had no love of money; thus the golden calf would be valueless to him; it might be sunk in the sea; he was rich in Vera's love. The feud between himself and father might last his lifetime; he would have chosen that it had never been; but, existing, it might endure on, and the breach widen every day. The cottage at Windermere, so small, so pretty, would still remain. The abode of so much happiness might be maintained on a small income, and that income he could work for and not feel disgraced; but a disgrace it would be to him if he allowed vain rumours to be sifted; he would not fall in a trap that had been laid to ensnare him.

There was mirth at Windermere that laughed in merry glee, happiness and contentment in the cottage, cheerfulness reigned there without wealth; whilst melancholy, depression, and wealth had ruled the home of his childhood and made it distasteful to him. Such were Athelstan's reflections late in the evening as he passed by Winander Cottage just to see the outside, and, perhaps, the glimmer of light in the windows, on the way to his hotel.

A light burned brightly, seen at intervals between the branches of the trees. Athelstan

lingered; he saw a shadowy form pass out of the deep antique porch; the outline was indistinct, but he saw enough to convince him that the form was tall and broad, and a man. The light at the doorway was immediately extinguished after the exit.

When trust and confidence are firm, no suspicion creeps into the subtle brain of man. A late visitor, was the conclusion Athelstan formed, and he continued sauntering on his way. The man overtook him, for he walked at a brisk pace. The man wore the dress of a Turk.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TURK.

'The bonds of spirit are asunder broken.

. . . . . .

On every side appears a silent token
Of what will be hereafter.'—THOMAS WADE.

AT the hotel Athelstan met the Turk face to face.

Athelstan did not avoid him, but smoked his evening pipe whilst the Turk smoked his hookah in the general smoking-room.

The Turk sat on the broad low seat, with an Oriental graceful carelessness, in silence. He did not turn his head an inch to notice Athelstan as he entered the room. His dark red fez suited his olive brown complexion, and concealed a broad forehead; the expression of his eye was quicker in movement, and lighter in colour, than is generally seen in the Turkish race; the almond-shaped, dreamy, quiet list-

lessness was absent. In every movement of limb existed the soft, supple ease of a high-class man of the East. His carefully trimmed moustache, his long filbert nails, tended to a nicety, denoted that his personal appearance was a study of weighty matter. His tunic was of the finest cloth, and his boots fitted him like a skin, seamless to sight, and the feet they encased were small and well formed. His age might be judged to be about fifty. Athelstan quietly took note of all these little details, and decided that the Turk might be known at the cottage, if alone grade of caste gave him the privilege. Then he made up his mind to satisfy his curiosity, to know if he was the same man whom he had seen leave the porch of Winander Cottage.

He was happy; he trusted where he loved. Distrust would give birth to misery; and he reasoned within himself thus:—Possibly, when Vera was an actress, her acquaintances might be of great variety in nation, creed, and colour, but her friends would be select; and he failed not to remember that the pet marmosets had been sent Vera from Turkey.

Athelstan was undecided whether the Turk had the *entrée* to Winander Cottage, but the Turk was quite satisfied that Athelstan had. A quick mind had taken in much; yet Athelstan had not been conscious that he

had been scrutinised whilst he was scrutinising.

Athelstan wishing to show the Turk a little courtesy offered him his newspaper, remarking it contained the latest news.

The Turk removed the pipe from his lips, and opened his mouth in a languid manner, as if it was the organ that carried sound to his brain. He took the paper, and, after the two words, 'Thank you,' uttered slowly and clearly with foreign accent, he resumed smoking.

Athelstan let not the ice he had broken congeal *en mass;* he dashed quickly into the hole, and continued,—

'I think we have mutual friends here?'

The same actions with the mouth and pipe were made by the Turk as when first addressed. It might be that he was not fluent in the English language, and he gave thought in the interval to form the answer he desired to make, as well as to clearly understand the words spoken.

'Mutual friends here? So it may be. Name them, if you please.'

'They live in Winander Cottage.'

Athelstan used caution in his answer.

'I do not know Winander Cottage. The name of friends, if you please.'

'Verge. Do you know that name?'

'Verge,' repeated the Turk. 'So, so—it is

a name known to me; but Winander Cottage is unknown.'

'Good fishing, or the scenery, may have induced you to visit this district?'

'No. I have no taste for fishing; but for a pretty woman yes, I have. Miss Verge has been on the stage. She has been pointed out to me. I admire her. Is it possible to buy a wife in England—under the rose—as you say? Tell me.'

The Turk looked keenly at Athelstan.

'What folly! No! Why, man, think you that you are still in Turkey?' said Athelstan, in a tone of horror.

'No. Then I could not purchase Miss Verge at any price?'

'Only at the price of her love, and that she could not give you. She is betrothed.'

'Then she is sacred;' and this said, the Turk returned the pipe to his lips, and looked listlessly at Athelstan.

Athelstan fancied he had gained all he wished, and was satisfied that the Turk was not the man who left Winander Cottage. Yet he felt annoyed that this Turk had seen Miss Verge—his own Vera—and decided that the man must be in his boots, as he had forgotten the country he was in, by alluding to the purchase of a wife as he might a horse or a dog, regardless of her superior degree in the order of existence.

'Contemptuous brute!' half audibly passed Athelstan's lips, as he left the Oriental dosing over his hookah.

Athelstan entered his sleeping-room with a body weary, a mind ill at ease, but a faith firm that in the end Vera would be the delight of his father's home.

In contradiction to all that he had said for her sake, there was a lurking desire to possess the golden calf; and his conviction was strong that his father would be too jealous of his offspring to bequeath it to an alien. Yet he might to charities. That would give renown to his name—and he hungered for praise and laudation.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

'Stranger! the voice that trembles in your ear,
You would have placed had you been fancy-free,
First in the chorus of the happy sphere,
The home of deified mortality.'

RICHARD MONCKTON.

THE morning broke bright, the vivid clearness of the sky was touched here and there with light flitting clouds that in their course now and again shaded the sun from the bright water on the lake, and cast soft shadows that gave a richer tone in contrast to the glittering, playing ripples. There was the fresh morning scent from cedar and lime, from flower and shrub, from the sward-covered earth, with its daffodil and clover, its primrose and violet; and a slight, delicious breeze, fresh from the high hills, played

over all, rustling through the leaves, and stirring the long grass still wet with dew.

As happy as the morn was Vera's heart; it sympathised with the sunlight and gay song of the birds. Vera's husband was expected at the cottage. Her impatience to see him led her to surprise him on the road from his hotel. Her spirit was buoyant, her step light and quick, her eye beamed with a peculiar brilliancy given by its tone of colour, her golden hair streamed wildly from under her large straw hat, all made her look a picture of spring, full of hope, love, and confidence.

Vera grew more demure as she went to see her mother, whom she chid for being late.

'You will never be healthy or wealthy, darling mother, until the late hours night and morning are reformed. Your eyes look weary from late sleeping, and you are only half awake, and I am rushing out to enjoy the day.'

'My eyes look heavy from late sleeping, dear child! perhaps so,' said Madame Verge, though knowing too well weeping was the cause of their heaviness. 'I do not like you to go out so early alone, love; it is not decorous; people may talk. You understand me. I make no doubt your demeanour will accord with the rules of strict propriety; but, my child, your name has been eulogised by the public, you are in some degree a marked person, and you are still

very young; and this is a resort for people who idle their time, and consequently have eyes and ears open, and no passing thing or sound escapes their notice, and they will see you alone, and make a mole-hill into a mountain.'

'Darling mother, you are still sleepy in mind, or you would never punish me so heavily as to ask me to remain cooped up in an acre, when I have miles of bright sunshine outside our dear little cottage to roam over.'

'This once, my child, I permit it so early. Vera, my child, I must have you serious. Tell me frankly—for Mr Morgane comes here so frequently, and I know nothing of his family—have you been foolish enough to form any attachment?'

'Yes. I have made him my pet pet, and so have you, mother dear.'

'Be more serious. Has he declared himself to you?'

'The best of the morning is passing, dear mother; I will tell you a long tale—no! not now. A tale of love told by a lover often grows tedious by its length; but it will keep, dear mother, until I return home. I will make Athelstan—'

Vera hesitated. It was the first time she had called Mr Morgane by his Christian name in conversation with her mother.

'Be careful, my child. If a man has honour-

able intentions, and he has gained the love of a daughter, he will— Why do you blanch to a deadly whiteness, my Vera?'

'I hate a secret, mother.'

'A secret, child!'

'Well, mother, I promise to weary you with how he gained a daughter's love, and what came of it. I will work up a romance to please you. White or red, I cannot stop even to look in the glass to see my complexion's tint, but go I must now.'

'To meet him?' said Madame Verge gravely.

'Perchance, yes; perchance, no; but trust me, darling mother; trust Mr Morgane—he is honourable, true as the sun in its course, and as changeless. One kiss, mother, and I shall feel you have forgiven me keeping you in suspense, perhaps for one long hour.'

It was a long interval of three hours before the gay-spirited wife returned to Winander Cottage. Leaving her mother, Vera passed over the ha-ha into the public road, surrounded by dogs that vied with each other to gain caress and notice, and were in as merry a trim as their light-hearted mistress, who carried several sticks of divers shapes and colours. Each dog she had taught to know and rescue its own; and she loitered often on her road, to play with her pets. This she did with grace, enhanced by the perfect contour of figure that Nature gave her, and, perhaps, culture added

grace also by the art taught in the profession that she had followed, almost from her cradle.

Vera walked some distance quite undisturbed; the land seemed given up to the birds and the creeping things that were their food, so lonely was it at this hour, in the bright glare of a morning sun. At last, when in sight of the hotel that faced the lake, and where she loitered to humour her pets, up sprang from behind a tree, and dashed over the long grass, a Turk, so his dress proclaimed him. Two of the dogs, Reni and Dürer, shook their shaggy wet coats, and ran playfully towards him.

'A strange freak,' thought Vera, for all her dogs were indifferent to strangers when abroad, but after a first meeting they were quick in recognising their friends, and she had studied all their peculiarities. Yet, stranger still, the Turk patted their wet heads and called them by name. Possibly—they were such great beasts—he felt safer to name them, as they were bounding about him so jovially; and Vera formed the idea that her dogs were as well known and marked as herself.

Vera sounded the whistle at the end of her whip. It had little effect on her dogs; but the Turk answered it by going towards her, and thus leading her dogs back.

'Pardon me for speaking ill of your dogs—they are bad mannered; I forgive them only on this plea, that they have at last led me to you.'

'I am sorry they have annoyed you. I will keep them away. Come, Reni, Dürer, be good doggies.'

'This is the first time I have spoken to you, Miss Verge,—not the first time I have seen you and heard your voice, when you have not known I have been near. I have marked both.'

'Then, sir, I think you as ill-mannered as my dogs; good-morning.'

'You have interrupted me; but, indeed, I meant no offence, Miss Verge,—far from it. I feel so happy that I have spoken—so happy; and it would give me delight just to touch your hand,—as it were, to pay homage to your talent.'

Vera's fears suggested to her mind that the man must be mad; but she knew the dogs would protect her at a given word, so she gave him her hand, dreading that he might squeeze it immoderately, yet afraid to offend him.

The Turk held Vera's hand with gentle firmness, and said,—

'Miss Verge, you may think I possess only the divine fire of imagination when I tell you I have a right to hold you in affectionate esteem, even to love you dearly.'

The Turk stooped his fez-covered head, and imprinted a lingering kiss on the hand he held.

'A mad Turk is dreadful,' thought Vera, fearing to offend, and not brave enough to withdraw her hand.

When the man raised his head, traces of deep feeling were visible in his expression, and an intense effort to suppress his emotion. A tragic turmoil tore his heart and harassed his mind. He could not battle against things that he knew existed; he had his Ethon, an ever-present, ever-gnawing, never-ceasing persecutor. He had waited to find this opportunity with patience; he seized it eagerly; he would make more of it. He was silent until he had confidence in himself that he could speak calmly and appear less impressed than he was in truth. He felt agitated far more than his unimpressionable nature usually admitted, yet at this moment he was making a violent effort against his nature, and he was deeply pained. His tenderest and holiest feelings were causing him the bitterness of anguish. He had long been resigned to a hard fate voluntarily accepted; it was so difficult to add another heart-breaking thought to brood over in his lone life that he had made for himself, but loved not—for he loved a domestic hearth, and his was desolate.

'Vera—let me call you Vera, though it is the first time I have spoken to you.'

There was so soft a tone of sorrow in the man's voice, so steady a look of calm affection in his eye, that Vera checked not this deluded, mad man, but she made him no answer.

'My lips, too, have never kissed you till this hour, yet I have dreamed of you for many years; and as each year you grow in womanly grace, I will obtain a fresh picture of you. I have one here close to my heart, a talisman to protect me from evil—believe this true.'

The Turk drew from between the breast buttons of his close tunic a coloured miniature of Vera.

'It is not worth your keeping, believe me.'

'Dear Vera, my thoughts recurring to you have made my actions good when I meditated evil. This face will be a more vivid aid—that influence is worth keeping.'

'If that is so, keep it still.'

Vera was becoming alarmed, for the Turk still held her hand whilst he spoke, and his words were so strange and free.

'I will, Vera. Now look well into my eyes, on the features of my face—take note and remember. I shall leave this country soon, but I shall not forget this interview. Your face will be dearer to me since I have seen its beauty. Vera, I ask you also to keep in mind this hour for many a day. We may meet again when my hair may be grey, and your agile step grown heavy; think you that you will then recall my features?'

'Quite perfectly,' said Vera, feeling her courage oozing away quickly.

Her hand being still grasped with a gentle pressure, prevented her rushing, with her dogs as an escort, to the hotel, that was within sight, at which she hoped her husband had arrived. As her hand was thus held she must appear brave, and assume dignity to cope with the Turk, who had her fast, and looked so steadfastly on her.

'Then, if in north latitudes or south, in the western hemisphere or eastern, we shall meet, remember this day, Vera.'

'I shall never, never forget it, whenever or wheresoever we meet.'

'I believe you, Vera; such an incident as this could not happen twice in a lifetime. I shall remember it till death. Farewell, Vera—not farewell for ever; we shall meet again.' The Turk again bowed low, kissed Vera's hand, released it. With a sad face — so sad that Vera pitied him —and in a broken voice, he repeated,—'Vera, we shall meet again.'

Vera saw tears in the man's eyes, and felt grieved that a stranger could be moved so strongly at a parting that ended an interview that appeared to have been desired under the effect of delusion, and if not delusion, the cause was a mystery that could not be solved by her. She looked at him in wonderment, but without fear now, as he walked away, taking the direction that led to the cottage.

CHAPTER IX.

A WIFE'S INFLUENCE.

'I meant the day-star should not brighter rise,
Nor lend like influence from its lucent seat;
I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,
Hating the solemn vice of greatness—pride;
I meant each softest virtue there should meet,
Fit in that softer bosom to reside:
Only a learned and manly soul
I purposed her; that should, with even powers,
The rock, and spindle, and the shears controul
Of Destiny, and spin her own free hours.'

BEN JONSON.

WHEN Vera turned away from watching the Turk, before her, some twenty yards distant, was her husband. Her countenance cleared from gloom and beamed again in smiles as she hastened to meet him: no confusion, no restraint were visible. Vera's disposition was rich in generosity, and one that shed happiness around

her. She was frank to a fault—in the warmth of her affection, she trusted all whom she loved; but a deep wrong or treachery would chill her into a dangerous enemy, harden her into a bitter foe. In adversity, calamity, or danger, she was fearless and strong. Young as she was, she had proved this nobly under severe trials, for time had been in earning her porridge she had not means to add the salt; for she had helped the manager of her company, and it had not been in his power to repay her. But she could not despair, and the harder she worked in her profession the happier she became, and with that blessing she was ever cheerful.

Now that she had both salt and porridge without earning them, she questioned was it quite so savoury? or was it that her secret marriage weighed on her mind, and broke the light happy confidence that had been between her and her mother? There was something she missed that made her cup one thought bitter.

'Athie, dearest, it is a long week that I have not seen you; and dear— But you are ill!'

'In mind, Vera, sorely ill. Who is that man who has just left you?'

'A madman. He called me by name, and, poor fellow, he wears my likeness on his chain

hid carefully away, and intends to remember me till death. But, Athie, we will forget him. Let me hear about yourself. What annoys you?'

'That Turk. His name, Vera?'

'How can I tell you? I never saw the man until a few minutes ago. He knew me; seen me, perhaps, as Lady Teazle, who knows? And, then you know some madmen do fall in love with actresses. Athie, you did.'

Vera laughed, as she raised herself on tiptoe to kiss her husband. He did not lower his face an inch.

'What has offended you, Athie, dear?'

'That Turk.'

Vera had read and studied character enough to know what that tone meant. Her proud lips were pressed close, her eye flashed as much pride as would become the proudest victor over a victim, after a well-contested combat following a challenge of prowess. Her attitude was dignified, in which she lost no grace or beauty; her accent and gesture bespoke that pride was the ruling passion of her words,—

'Athie, *you* distrust *me?*'

'Not yet, Vera; no, not yet.'

Vera knew her power—knew the spell that had brought flatterers to her feet when she could tyrannise and be obeyed, when she

touched hearts and left her own untouched. She knew that spell was her beauty, but it was ever a smiling beauty. Her large hat encumbered her. She threw it off her head till it hung back on her shoulders; her bright golden hair, to which the sun added its lustre whilst the breezes played over it, fell in wild disorder, for it was all unbound; the proud look and dignity relaxed into a slight smile, and with the resistless charm of girlish ease of manner she flung her arms around Athelstan's neck, and pillowed her head on his broad chest, and said softly,—

'Not yet, Athie; never shall you, no—never, never.'

Then she raised her head and looked into his face. His features had not regained their usual composure, the injured look lurked about them still.

'Athie, you believe me that I love you better than my life? I would forfeit life before your love.'

'Vera, swear it.'

'Again and again. Now, kiss me, for you have not yet, and after such a long absence.'

Athelstan gently pushed her from him.

'You have been an actress. Are you acting now? I scarcely know, Vera.'

'This from you, Athie? Shame, shame!'

'That man kissed your hand?'

'He did, Athie, he did. I acted then. I would not thwart a madman. I only had the courage to follow his bent of mind. He might have kissed my cheek or lips had he so desired. I should have acted then a passive part, under fear. My courage only came when he walked away. Then I was sorry he was sad, and so deluded. I cannot tell you more, Athie, for there is no more to tell; and it is right to tell you all that passed in that little scene you perhaps witnessed. Had you met a mad girl, who compelled you to kiss her hand, I would have asked some explanation; but, Athie, I should have believed what you told me. You look stern.'

'You never saw that Turk until a few minutes ago. Could you swear to that, Vera?'

'Yes; on my honour and in the face of truth, I swear it!' The proud curve of her lip, the dignity of carriage, and the haughty glance of her eye returned, for Vera felt her situation painful, as her husband doubted her simple yea and nay. 'Athelstan,' she continued, with a serious firmness, 'I feel in a false position. For your good, I would continue in it longer—uncomplaining I would endure it. But is it wise, if it is not absolutely necessary, to endure it? I am your wife, Athelstan, yet I am unrecognised by your family, my marriage is a secret in my own; I endure the

odium, but the deception torments me. If it need not exist, let it end this day for ever.' Athelstan made no answer; a thoughtful look took the place of the stern expression as his wife spoke. Vera continued, in a firm tone,—'My mother questions me. I evade her in ambiguous answers. A madman annoys me, and I cannot go to my husband and claim his protection. I am Miss Verge, and any man may speak of his love to me. Is this position of a wife right, unless the necessity for it is very great? Athelstan give me this day my true position, and your right to protect me from the insults of deluded men.'

Vera held herself at a distance from Athelstan, in the attitude of offended dignity, as one claiming a right, not asking a favour. He had only seen her with this dash of majestic bearing in her actions on the stage. She had acted the characters she had played with so much natural ease and to the life, that it was difficult to consider her tone and manner were natural now. Had she wept, had she coaxed, had she shown fear, he would have more readily believed her. But Vera felt she was distrusted and disbelieved. She was indignant, whilst he was jealous—feelings called into existence by the behaviour of the Turk.

'That requires some consideration, Vera.'

'Then, Athelstan, I will leave you until you have formed your decision.'

With great hauteur of manner Vera left Athelstan. When a few yards distant from him she used her dog's whistle, and the dogs bounded one after the other from various nooks and turns, and she led them to the pathway in the direction leading to Winander Cottage.

Vera walked on, without turning her head to see if Athelstan made a move to follow.

When left to his reflections, Athelstan felt the truth and justice of his wife's remarks. He felt keenly, for he knew that the momentous secret that she kept was a great cost to her frank nature. He would make his peace at the moment; the error was his; he had refused to meet his wife on the same footing as usual; this made a breach between them—the first since his marriage, therefore it was serious. He had sworn to honour her, and unto the end of his life he would honour her; and before her, at no great distance, must be the man who had molested her, inasmuch as he had spoken to her without being introduced, and spoken of her as no English husband could approve.

He decided he would believe his wife true, and the Turk to be a deluded maniac. As Miss Verge, Vera was in a false position, and

he saw the danger of it for the first time. He was perplexed, but he would protect her, and try means to place her in the bosom of his family, and still possess a portion of the golden calf.

As Vera heard the footsteps of her husband, and the dogs running back to meet him, she felt it was her turn now to rule, so perverse and inconsistent is the disposition of women. But now Vera had an important point to gain, and if she had strength she would not waver in the plan that she had quickly formed to reach it.

'Vera, let us stop here and talk this matter right.'

'I am quite willing. Have you come to a conclusion on the most important point for consideration?'

'We will talk that over. Of course, I see you are in a false position,—fraught with danger.'

'And you, too, Athelstan. Is it not quite possible that you are looked upon as a "great catch," and open to the attractions of well-born beautiful girls? Are you not like me, walking through life with a cloud of deception hanging around you?'

'That is true. Sit here, Vera,' and Athelstan pointed to the root of a tree that had grown high out of the ground, and which had

previously formed the seat on which the Turk rested when he watched for Vera on her road to meet her husband. Athelstan leaned his back against the tree and faced Vera, and saw she was in no light mood.

'Am I right, Vera, in thinking you have no patrician tastes,—no wish to mix with people of quality and fashion?'

'Athelstan, you have told me you are wealthy. I wish to be in your station of life, and grace it as your wife should.'

'You are weary of country pursuits, Vera,—of your pets,—your embroidery. I feared it.'

'No, I love them; but when you take me to London, I would like a handsome drawing-room, just like Lady Bee's, and a barouche like the Countess Sea's, which is perfection—it is as easy as a hammock. Oh! it is a love!'

'Your words wound me, Vera, and make my position more difficult.'

'They do, Athie! Do you not wish me to appreciate your wealth? Have you not given me a position above my own?—could I slight the gift? Yet to know I am your companion for life,—to feel that you are mine for ever, outweighs all your wealth, Athie.'

'Ah, Vera! but if my wealth proved moonshine?' Athelstan said, very seriously.

'I should be sorry—very sorry; not so much

for the loss of wealth as that you would have deceived me — and deceived me needlessly. My love would have been as true had you not a sou; but I would have been prudent, not precipitate, nor listened to your scheme. I would have earned an income, whilst you followed some calling to add to it. But see, Athie, we have married in haste—a reproach on both of us!' Vera had a second thought, and, acting on it, said,—'Athie, do you tell me your wealth may prove moonshine, to test me?'

'I do, Vera,—to find how much you love wealth.'

'How much. Ah, very much! Wealth is a key to power, and I am ambitious. I love to excel,—to receive evidence of my power, —to be marked among the eminent,—to be a star among other stars, outshining all.'

'That is a dangerous desire.'

'Have you never felt it? It is an invigorating influence,—a feeling that keeps energy alive,—makes you strive always to get one step higher, and, that attained, another higher lures you on. Surely you have tasted how sweet such desires are; and wealth alone places you at an altitude that makes further steps on to success easy.'

'Sweet to satiety, Vera, when success follows the steps, but bitter to nauseousness when the

desire is unattained. My ambition is weak, daily it has been growing weaker. I have looked on our cottage by the lake as a palace, —a home in which no charm is missing,—the height of my ambition. There, I have forgotten the turmoils of London, and avoided the jargon of empty words and insincerity too often met.'

Vera thought it wise not to agree with her husband. Did he wish her to be contented in the country, and not give her his name and position publicly, and yet able to do so, as the only son of a wealthy father? She must probe the matter deeper, and get to the bottom of the vexed question, that she might gain an answer to her most reasonable demand.

'The cottage or the mansion signifies little; poverty or wealth we at this moment need not discuss. More to the purpose, let us talk over the reason our marriage is still to be kept a secret. Tell me why it is, Athie; sit cosily by me, not stand in a moody manner all unnatural to you. My dogs show affection for me; they lie at my feet. Dear Reni or Francisca, or noble Dürer, would have protected me from that Turk, but you, Athie, kept at a distance.'

Vera spoke in a tone of assumed raillery.

'The Turk patted your dogs—I noticed that, Vera.'

'So did I. That was strange. Now, Athie,

come to the point, and tell me what I will know. Why is our marriage to be longer kept secret from your father? You promised the secret should be kept only six months, and that time has long passed away, and still the secret is intact."

'My father I told of our marriage when we had been married a few months.'

Vera sprang quickly to her feet, and all the dogs followed suit.

'Dear old Athie, why did you not tell me that before? Then why is our marriage a secret from my mother? She loves you well, and would welcome you with joy as her son.' Athelstan was silent. Vera continued,—'Now, Athie as to your wealth being moonshine or reality I care not a jot. I can make money; and, my marriage avowed, Uncle Caston could not prevent me acting as he does now. Forsooth! I was too pretty to perform at a theatre, so he gave mother the cottage in which to bury me out of harm's way, and a small income. You have been my saviour, and have resuscitated me; and to complete our happiness, we can now let dear mother know our secret.'

'Vera, my father is in no humour to be propitiated; his prejudice runs so high that it is impossible to bring him to reason. He knows of our marriage, but it must remain still a secret from your mother.'

Vera's countenance fell.

'Your reason? for, sooner or later, she must know.'

'We are very happy in our cottage.'

'We shall not be, on our present footing. From this day distrust will grow and strengthen on both sides, and we shall be wretched. You evade my question. I see no valid reason that the secret should be longer kept. How is your father prejudiced against me? Am I too poor? Are you afraid I am too ugly and graceless to be introduced to your patrician world as your wife? Nothing will be too harsh for me to hear, as the cause of keeping me so far from your family.'

'Dear Vera, no. My father has seen you, —even forestalled an introduction; he went to our cottage months ago.'

'Athelstan, what do you mean?'

'The old gentleman who made you pluck him flowers for his coat was my father.'

'Then I dislike your father. I remember him well. Does he dislike me?'

'He is prejudiced against the profession you followed. We must wait until his humour changes, or he may cut us off with a shilling.'

'Let him; I can work for both,' said Vera, with spirit, 'and show him how noble is my profession.'

'Reflect, Vera. Riches are better to possess

than poverty; and you covet Lady Bee's drawing-room, and the Countess of Sea's barouche.'

'Not at the sacrifice of my good name.'

'No, Vera, I have tested you; and if I can secure you the wealth that is your due, as it is mine, I will wait till I have the prospect of giving it to you. Then shall your mother know you bear my name, and my father be prevailed upon to receive you. Understand me,' Athelstan continued for Vera made no observation to her husband's suggestion, 'understand me clearly. It is not wise to ruthlessly throw away a fortune. Conciliation may affect much, but it will take time to work its influence to good.'

Vera looked thoughtful. She knew to fight against prejudice was often a harder battle than to fight an unbiassed mind: the one could reason, looking fairly on both sides; the other was blind, obstinate, and deaf.

'Are you speaking of years or months when you say time, dear Athie?'

'Perhaps years, Vera. My father is hard to turn.'

'Then, Athelstan, whether at the risk of riches or poverty, for good or for evil, my mother this day, in confidence, shall hear our secret. She knows nothing of your family,—no harm can accrue.'

'I fear she may determine to see my

father, before I have time to subdue his anger against me. She is a woman of decided character. At this moment, my father meditates a vengeance that would ruin my life, and consequently yours; do not hasten any evil that may be prevented by forethought.'

'No, Athie. Yet my mother shall know this day our secret; it shall be told her with all the true tale attached, and no ruin shall come by her acts. Caution is her ruling principle, and she will exercise it to our good. And, Athie, have you not said our cottage is the height of your ambition? so it shall be of mine, and we shall be happy again, and you shall make it your home; and if your father objects to that arrangement, I can earn money, and we will fear no more the wolf's head.'

'Ah, that *caput lupinum* we must propitiate until altered into a friend and father again! You are incited at this moment to say you will earn money—that is generous, Vera, but I know you love wealth, drawing-rooms, and barouches.'

'Forget I said such foolish words. See, dearest Athie, I never had wealth; perhaps it would bore me as it does many—compel me to entertain, when I would wish to wander here with you; or make me drive when I would prefer to walk. And we can

live just as the whim takes form at Winander Cottage—and it is a dear little home; only, Athie, you must live in it always, to make it quite happy. You have passed happy days there, Athie.'

'Happy! Vera, no time will efface them. Old as that cottage is, no being has been more blest or happier in it than I. When away, Vera, in my solitary wanderings, I recall the visits to mind, that too abruptly end, and I live in the hope of repeating them, to be influenced by the joy that you, my wife, have shed over my life. But, Vera, you love wealth—that I will remember too.'

'Nonsense, Athie. I love you, wealthy or poor, I love you. Have I not again and again said it?'

Vera kissed her husband, who did not repulse her; she put her hand on his shoulder and said, in her most winsome voice,—

'Now, Athie, we are friends; we will go to *our* cottage, and arrange how we may live in peace there till death.'

'I leave myself in your hands, use me as you will. Women scheme better than men; but be careful.'

'Better intriguers, eh? How I do thank that dear old Turk, who caused our first quarrel, that has been the means to bring you to understand I must no longer be Miss Verge.'

CHAPTER X.

THE BISHOP OF MALAVITA.

'Oh, sir! pray is this gold? and this? and this?
. . . . . .
Doth it sound?
Melodiously—a golden tune.'—SHIRLEY'S *Arcadia.*

'Go miser, go; for lucre sell thy soul,
Truck wares for wares, and trudge from pole to pole.'
DRYDEN.

MR MORGANE took sweeping views of all affairs that concern life, and acted on broad bases. He had formed familiar acquaintance with celebrities, and regarded the greatest as pigmies. Under his grave countenance he was guilty of feeling contempt when his thin net was adroitly thrown over them, and entangled sufficiently for him to gain the advantage he desired. His successes were so numerous that he held the faith of fatalism, and felt he was an instrument guided by the hand of Time to ac-

complish great ends; even to alter the course of the world's destinies, morally and commercially; by his schemes to stir up enthusiasts to seek oases in the dead sands of the boundless desert of barbarisms, there to implant life.

Mr Morgane had superficially studied the ancient Greeks. He took pride to himself that he was Lycurgus and Solon, Pythagoras and Plato, rolled into one being. He knew their works, he dreamed he thought their thoughts. He gave to himself credit that he possessed more than a dash of Homeric genius,—was more worthy of praise than Praxiteles. His epics were of heroes battling against darkness, and they were, with pride, recited among his admirers as grand ideas. The statue that was to issue forth to light from a dense, unformed mass was no Cupid or Apollo, but the Dawn of Nations. Nations to be blest with constitutions not formed by chance, nor violence, nor caprice of circumstances, but chiselled on lines that would at once give dignity to laws, duties to rulers, privileges to subjects, and remuneration to labour,—extend freedom and diminish slavery. Mr Morgane's emissaries were in almost unknown lands, chipping off the rough edges of this colossal statue under his guiding hand. All was shaped on lines planned for self-aggrandisement, and the tangible substance found its

way into his pocket; and his satellites had their chips too; and a very few natives, if any, were made the better for the enterprises.

Mr Morgane entered his carriage with his usual proud step, and started on his first stage from London to Chester. He expected to gather grist on his way to Chester, and also to scatter seed that should bear fruit. His arrival at different halting-places had been duly announced, and his friends would be on the alert to welcome him in their midst.

During this first stage, after Mr Morgane had derived comfort from his reflections,—Who was so holy as he? *who had atoned for a sin so nobly as he?* who had benefited the world as he? and answered his reflections in the single word, nobody, he made a soft pillow for an easy head in the luxuriant padding of his carriage, and forgot his blissful state in sleep.

The speed of the horses slackened as they mounted a hill; the altered motion of the carriage awoke Mr Morgane, and he was conscious of being under a scorching sun, and thirsty. He moistened his dry throat with a sip of water from his flask, and thanked Father Mathew that he drank no stronger beverage. From the brow of the hill he looked upon the surrounding country, that was marked in patches of various shades. Here the reaper's sickle had left bristling stubble, and sheaves of wheat were

grouped in picturesque order. The deep yellow ears that ceased to wave in graceful noddings still held a beauty all their own; stalks firmly braced together upheld them from kissing their nourishing mother Earth, that had fostered her children to repletion. There, rippling and swaying as a sea of gold, was wheat that the light breeze fanned, still untouched by reapers; nodding with heavy, full ear, bending the stalk that supported it, it stands erect to-day from root to ear, but to-morrow may see it in sheaves, or, alas! battered down by storm and hail, the farmer's drear enemies. Other fields are seen of stubble dry and brown, yet the ridged lines add a colouring and charm to the landscape. Here a homestead peeps out low and broad, there a spired church pointing heavenwards as an index in the bright, clear sky. Such are the garden lands that still may be seen in the first stage from London to Chester.

On the hill's brow near the roadway, under the shade of a far-spreading oak, sat a man; his head was uncovered, and he wore the long tunic of a Turk. He left the lady who was sitting near him abruptly, and hastened towards Mr Morgane's carriage; he saw the occupant, and was satisfied. The lady questioned him on his return; his answer was short and ambiguous.

'The face of an enemy I seldom forget; that

man's is no exception; and thus we meet again! Enough; let us talk on other subjects.'

Mr Morgane still looked on the Turk, but not a trace in his expression showed he gave any heed to him; and he looked vacantly over the green meadows that he was soon beside, and on the wild flowers, harebells, and feathery ferns; on the pastured cattle, that were cooling their hoofs as they drank from the stream, or stood stationary as statues. Then he came to the village, the red tilings of some cottages contrasting well with the foliage of heavy-leaf chestnut trees, old, yet grand in age, and the lighter-leaf beech and lime. Clustering on the cottages were woodbine, jasmine, and westeria; all gave beauty and artistic touches to rural simplicity, and showed a taste and tone of refinement in the villagers. Mr Morgane passed all unheeded; he was thinking over plans to increase the size of his golden calf.

Passing the village and a patch of common, covered with gorse, the carriage stopped at Briand Hall, a residence of sufficient pretensions to be styled a country seat, yet the house was of moderate size. The park surrounding it was finely wooded, and deer abounded; a trout stream ran through it, and contiguous were many acres of land appropriated to preserve game.

The choice of site of this residence had been faultless; it commanded a *coup d'œil* embrac-

ing all the chief beauties of its surroundings. Such was the home of the newly-consecrated Bishop of Malavita, who was on the eve of departure from his father's house to go to an unhealthy district. Mr Morgane had brought him into notice, and now desired to use him for his own purpose and benefit.

The Bishop welcomed Mr Morgane, and, much to his surprise and amusement, Mr Morgane recited one of his short epics. In it were portrayed trials and difficulties, but patience and long perseverance triumphed over all. Mr Morgane considered this composition was suited to the man and occasion. It was easy work for Mr Morgane to utter words, but to carry out their import would have been beyond his strength. In few words, he was a good preacher when he had listeners.

'See, my dear friend, the opportunity you have to become of great worth, when transplanted in a fresh land.'

'Or worthless,' answered Bishop Donwell. 'It is possible the new soil may kill me. I am a younger son, otherwise I would not be a chiffonnier, and pick up cloth or rag without choice. Compulsion makes me accept with good grace what others have refused.'

'I was about to observe,' continued Mr Morgane, 'you will fill a noble office, in a land under a bright sky; yet, it may not be charac-

terised as possessing a bracing atmosphere; no, Malavita cannot possess that. But see, there are enervating influences in England,—banquets where the sensual meet at overloaded tables, and after gratification of palate, wild pleasures allure the unwary; utterly regardless of the waste of valuable time and intellect, they enter opera-houses, theatres, and worldly clubs—of course, your cloth prohibits you frequenting such places.'

Mr Morgane was pompous in manner; the new bishop had been Athelstan's tutor at Cambridge; he had not forgotten that fact—the tutor had.

Bishop Donwell said,—

'I will answer you in the words used by one of George the Third's chaplains when reproved after visiting a theatre; the words suit my case: "Sire, I am not ashamed at appearing at any place where our most religious and gracious Sovereign, the head of the Church, thinks proper to be present." In truth, witnessing good acting is invigorating, and is a strong tonic to the mind.'

Mr Morgane raised his hands in deprecation.

'Utterly degenerated! The mind's tonic is the bright pure beams shed from the eternal lights of Heaven, that find chinks in our faulty constitutions to shine through, invigorating the mass.'

'What does he mean?' thought the Bishop, who made no answer.

Mr Morgane continued,—

'I fear that the germ of licentious pleasures may have been instilled into the too susceptible and sympathetic soul of poor Athelstan, by error of teaching. He frequents theatres. In his early days, possibly you accompanied him.'

'No. That would have been against your wish.' Bishop Donwell did not hold Mr Morgane in high estimation, but he was a man conscientious in his duty, and he added, 'Athelstan is a fine, noble youth.'

'The licentious habits of the age have ruined— My sorrow shall be silent. Forgive my abruptness.'

Bishop Donwell made no comment, but turned to the window and fed a deer that was near it with biscuit.

'This is one of four deer that I take into exile with me, possibly to die—even then, their hides, filled with straw, will remind me of dear old Briand Hall.'

'By the way, there is good ivory in Malavita,' said Mr Morgane carelessly; yet the subject was of importance, and had given occasion for his visit to his dear friend the Bishop.

'The sound of ivory makes me feel the air sultry already.'

'It is a valuable article, and in demand. Keep your weather eye open; steer right, and your profit may be large; and with money, how much good may be accomplished!'

'No, Mr Morgane, I may not love my berth, yet I will not forget my cloth—I will not trade.'

The Bishop's answer made Mr Morgane draw back suddenly. Could it be possible that a poor man had no thirst for gold? or could refuse to become his tool to shape some angle on his Dawn of Nations? He would net the Bishop yet. So thinking, Mr Morgane said,—

'The business shall be done through me, or my agents; you shall only have a sleeping interest in profits. Fie! fie! I did not ask you to trade,—merely your interest to forward the charity work.'

'I misunderstood. Trade is the antithesis of the order of the hierarchy that has added me to its number; directly or indirectly, all profits I decline.'

After a few moments' pause, Mr Morgane said, carefully feeling his way,—

'Dear Donwell, I will not influence you further than giving you a few letters of introduction to one or two friends I have living in Malavita, who will give you an insight into several matters. The letters I will seal for the moment—secrecy as to their contents is a

necessary precaution; but I will state their twofold character in few words: they convey the nature of the business I wish to open up in Malavita; and, at the same time, I mention your name to my friends. You will find Lewis Morgane is well-known in Malavita, and in more remote nooks of the earth.'

Mr Morgane took several letters from a little black bag, and, after having made the envelopes secure, gave them to Bishop Donwell.

'How good of you to give me friends in Malavita. Englishmen, I hope,' said the Bishop, as he eagerly took the letters.

'Very likely. Surnames do not bespeak nationalities.'

Bishop Donwell's countenance fell. Though his position in Malavita would give him the lead in the country, he desired to mix amongst Englishmen of his own grade, such as he supposed Mr Morgane's friends might be.

Mr Morgane suggested many business negotiations as being possible for the Bishop to aid, and ultimately drew him into accepting, for charitable purposes, donations in proportion to profit on the enterprises. This was proposed as a stimulant to incite him to work well in the cause; in fact, to influence him to draw out of the fire hot chestnuts that Mr Morgane would consume, minus those given in charity, the merit of which he would reap.

CHAPTER XI.

'THE LAURIUM.'

'*Gloucester*,
To be reveng'd on Rivers, Vaughan, Grey;
But then I sigh, and, with a piece of Scripture,
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With old odd ends, stol'n forth of holy writ:
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.'

RICHARD THE THIRD.

MR MORGANE arrived at Chester, walked through the quaint old city, and among its tiers of streets and covered pathways. He fancied he admired the peculiarities of its strange construction. This fancy led him to alight from his carriage, and court the observation of the towns-people. Many would pay him respect. His pride in receiving their homage caused his broad chest to expand

to larger dimensions, and added to his proud step a firmer dignity. And he gloried in that kingly feeling. The longer he remained in the town, the less he admired it, and the more he admired himself. A short chat here, a word of courtesy there, a repetition of short tidings of news referring to his good actions, a friendly nod, a respectful touch of hat or deep courtesy, convinced him he was not like other men. By his works he was known; but his appetite for applause and honour was not yet satiated. Whilst walking through his native town, he dreamed when he had raised the colossus that was now being chipped into shape, not only his own towns-people would pay reverence to him, but beyond the many seas, in each old and new country, would nations bow to him for his good deeds done amongst them, in opening up unknown places to light and commerce. He looked at himself through a strong magnifying glass, and increased his importance beyond the limits of reason; but he was, as many others have been under this delusion, quite satisfied with himself.

Mr Morgane honoured two friends, Mr Knight and Mr Cade, above others. He invited them to drive with him to 'The

Laurium,' which was beyond the village of Nethernest, and where the Rev. Gordon Scott lived. Their political views differed from those of the clergyman's, and they had nothing in common with him, and, stating these reasons, declined the request.

'Eh, eh! Gordon not popular?' said Mr Morgane quickly, and his searching eye tried to read the countenances of his friends.

Mr Knight replied,—

'Popular with his own class as high noon to a happy child; but your nephew runs in a swift stream that we poorer men paddle through with difficulty.'

'I hope he is not proud—that is a heinous vice.'

Mr Morgane felt so proud in his own humility.

'No, no, the pride is with us; but Mr Cade will speak for himself.'

'It is well that we should not rub shoulders with the reverend man, though he may be highly popular among many,' said Mr Cade.

'Yet he is a good, worthy man?' said Mr Morgane inquiringly.

'Worthy of praise or blame undoubtedly,' said Mr Cade, with a sneer he could not repress.

Mr Morgane was driven to Nethernest, satisfied with the plans he had laid out for

Gordon, for it is generally true that the search is not diligent for things that are not desired to be known. His friends returned to Chester.

'You resisted saying you would kick Scott out of all society, and contented yourself by saying you would not rub shoulders with him, —neat of you, Cade.'

'Out of respect for good Mr Morgane, let me see his nephew, and I would hurl him out of time in a second.'

'Yet your peace is not disturbed now.'

'No thanks to him for that. Fortunately, the girl found his grins were not smiles, and she tired of him before a crisis came, except in the form of a wrangle.'

'And that you fostered, Cade?'

'Heavens! I did, and rightly. You shall be my groomsman shortly, if you judge so too.'

'Ay, and I will; and vote Scott a scamp.'

Mr Morgane reached 'The Laurium' at an inopportune moment. His arrival was expected the following day, but his advent forestalled the sober reception that would have greeted him, and came upon his nephew at an hour devoted to uproarious merriment and convivial festivities. The heavy part of the banquet was over; that is to say, the eating division, but still the wine was sparkling in the glasses of host and guests, and wit was noisy in its flow of brilliancy; and the spirits of the guests—they num-

bered thirty—were at the height of exuberance, and used to keep up a cross fire of puns and wild jokes.

In a second of time all became dumb, as though struck by a sudden flash of lightning. The Rev. Gordon Scott rose from his chair, with face whiter than his table-cloth, and said,—

'By the powers, at my lodge gates there is a visitor a thousand times more terrible than my bishop. All I implore is help, help, help, from one and all!'

'Depend on all. Shall he be drowned or shot, cozened or hooted?' said one guest.

'Give us the hint; we will save you from your enemy,' said another guest.

'Oh, would that the earth would open and swallow you up! How impossible! Besides, to devour you would not be hospitable. I have a bright idea, suggested by my confidential servant; in confidence I whisper it to you. I am presiding at a temperance meeting. Hit that off, please, and the glasses and bottles shall vanish, and I shall be surrounded by the *élite* in a good cause. Time presses. I will meet my bugbear, and trot him over the grounds for time to be given that the transformation scene be arranged, and firkins of water brought, and tea and coffee—*café noir*, and very *noir*, to subdue the odour of wine. Pardon my

absence. September is a month given to sporting talk, but mum on guns, please, and blank on hunting prospects. No *lapsus linguæ*. Remember, a temperance meeting.' Then the Rev. Gordon Scott continued in a tone of solemn burlesque,—'My fears call up the sound of wheels. The sound must be nerves playing tunes in my head; still I leave *sans cérémonie* to meet a customary growl against the good things of this life. Be temperate, my friends, I exhort you; and, Farmer Brown, make your jovial face long and sedate; be discreet, and short in words, or your wheat shall suffer in the future. The near future, my friends, prepare for quickly. Profit by the lesson just given, and behave as my temperance class, with a booser or two thrown in wishing to be re-reformed. Farmer Brown, if your face is not made longer, the odium will be cast on you. Adieu; my return is uncertain, but wait patiently.'

Outside the door was the confidential servant, gaiters in hand, that had a clerical cut, and were black.

'That necessary, Messenger? I wear those only in muddy weather.'

'Highly necessary, sir. Looks temperance-like; them shooting things would damage all.'

Messenger hastened to remove the shooting

things, and replace them by the clerical-cut gaiters.

'How about the rest of my costume? You have made a hybrid of me.'

'High bred or low bred, your costume shall be correct, sir, in a minute. Your long alpaca and sawney will top all.'

The servant had his master's interest at heart.

Gordon Scott slipped on his alpaca coat, and, with sawney hat in hand, slipped out of his house to meet his bugbear more terrible than his bishop.

Now, a word about 'The Laurium.' It was a grand old mansion, passing into its first phase of decay. It stood on a bosky height, looking snug among the foliage of ancient trees of magnificent growth and large size—elms and beeches, chestnuts and oaks, cedars of Lebanon and mountain ash. Among these luxuriant trees roadways and pathways were cut, winding hither and thither, to save the destruction of an aged oak or cedar. But the pathways were planned with skill; never an angle was made to spoil the curve of the beauty line. There were open spaces where lovely velvety lawns spread out; patterns in many blended colours in flowers and leaves were traced out in beds upon them—all were now in full bloom.

Thick high banks of great age were formed

of privet, holly, and laurel, all trimmed to nicety; archways were cut in them, and hide-and-seek could be well played amongst the eccentric mazes that they formed. Beyond these cultivated grounds was a wild, picturesque park, divided from the garden by a clear rippling stream of water, that was artificially made to wind picturesquely before the entrance of the mansion, in a broad channel, at a distance about six acres from it; this space, except that part forming the carriage-drive, was a well-kept lawn, studded over with clumps of trees and fine oaks, grand well-grown cedars, spruce firs—each a study for a painter—trained to faultless symmetry. Their beauty formed a charming woodland picture, that was often brightly reflected in the broad still water, whilst the trees near the mansion gave a grateful shade that subdued the glare of sun on the windows of the principal apartments of this splendid home—a building worthy its surroundings, and with pretensions to architectural beauty.

This noble structure was raised by a Morgane considerably more than two centuries ago; he was the first and last who was worthy to possess it. After passing through the hands of spendthrifts and resuscitated by new money brought by marriages with heiresses, it was inherited by the grandfather of

Mr Morgane. He had the bad habit of allowing his money to slip through his fingers, until ruin looked him suddenly face to face. In his dilemma, he caught sight of a beacon that led to a harbour of refuge. A rich Jewess fell in love with the self-ruined man, captivated by his handsome face and winning manners. She pitied his plight, and left her people, unpardoned for her folly in putting the worth of money at less value than love, and married the spendthrift.

Hephzibah was a good financier, had thrifty habits, frugal tastes, and careful husbandry. Nobody knew better how waste could soon impoverish a large estate, and how much careful attention could improve it in yielding money. Every bunch of grapes brought its value in shillings or sovereigns according to season; even a good turnip, or potato, or hay crop should not be despised; neither should the hares nor rabbits, the chickens and ducklings, the young porkers and swine tribe, be struck out of the list of profits.

The grazing land and dairy produce were brought into the scheme of profit, and yielded a good return. In time the condition of 'The Laurium' was retrieved, and the clever Mrs Morgane was not one whit less a gentlewoman being manageress of the estate herself; her accomplishments, mental and ar-

tistic, were of no ordinary character, whilst her ready wit made her the life of her social circle.

Hephzibah, the thrifty Jewess, left a son, father of Lewis Morgane, and money in trust, to be expended on the pleasure garden of 'The Laurium,' to be a memorial to her memory, instead of any gilded tomb raised to her honour.

Again 'The Laurium' passed through bad days. Waste and extravagance ran riot, not enough to efface Hephzibah's labours entirely, but to impoverish the estate considerably.

Her son at an early age died, leaving Lewis Morgane and two daughters. The elder became the second wife of an old marquis, whose children were older than herself. His death left her a young widow with an infant daughter, Lady Clara Perceval, over whom she appointed her brother guardian. During widowhood her godmother left her property. This, added to her own savings, made a considerable sum, and formed an acceptable augmentation to the small portion inherited by her daughter, in common with the numerous family of the old Marquis Villeroy.

The younger daughter married General Gordon Scott, a proud Scotchman, possessing moderate means, but a lineage so old that possibly it dated back to an age before pantaloons

and gowns were in vogue; all was unquestioned, therefore respect was gained by the man of ancient parentage. General and Mrs Scott died, and left a son, now the Rev. Gordon Scott, who promised to plague the world as much as his ancestors had done before his time. He embraced the Church as his profession from interested motives, and he drew a good income from a living that was in the gift of his family.

Lewis Morgane alone lived to mature age. He inherited much of the disposition of his grandmother, and a few of her virtues. His early course was spent in dissipation. A sudden event brought this course to a hasty close, and sobered him to see the mischief of his ways, and left a stain upon his conscience that was likely to be life-long. Though he could say,—

> 'Blest be the day I 'scaped the wrangling crew,
> From Pyrrho's maze and Epicurus' sty,'

yet the memory of that time haunted him still.

The day came that he had wisdom to see he had to build up his own fortune. He became wily and active. As a merchant trading in all things possible to get at and make profitable, from diamonds to quack medicines, he amassed a fortune so large that grandmother Hephzibah would have rejoiced, and she would have

claimed him as worthy of his lineage, had she lived to see his day.

There was no false rumbling in Gordon Scott's head now. The sound of wheels was true, and in haste the nephew met his uncle, stopped the carriage, seized his uncle's hand, welcomed him warmly, compelled him to alight, just to see the alterations that were being made.

'My dear Gordon, it is my intention to remain several days with you,—no need to hurry me; you are so excitable,' said Mr Morgane, with his usual gravity, which gravity, according to Rochefoucault's notion, 'is a mysterious carriage of the body, invented to cover the defects of the mind.'

'Yes, yes! but every hour of the several days has its appointment to meet; this is an off day, let us make the most of it.'

The sporting parson walked arm in arm with his uncle, led him over the bridge that spanned the stream, and landed him safely on the other side. He was not long in inventing a subject of improvement,—some trees were doomed to the axe—good timber, and in prime condition.

'Do you think I have lost my wits, lad? or have you lost yours?'

Mr Morgane shook Gordon's arm off his.

'Wits? Our wits are keen—yours untouched by age, mine matured by the ripe age of

twenty-six. Come,' and Gordon coaxed his arm again on his uncle's. 'There is a time that the old must make room for the young.'

'A heavy dig in my rib, Gordon. Rather too loud a thought.'

'La, no! are you so fond of your trees that they are never to come down?'

'Hang the trees! Where are you leading me? Pardon, I fear I used a bad word.'

'Very bad; better words would have been —fell the trees. So, instead of leading you to the wilderness, let us retrace our steps and return to the house.'

'The wilderness. Oh, the case is altered now! Another day, I may consider the question of felling trees there; now, I will speak to you on an important matter that has depressed my feelings. You take an interest in this place? The grounds are in perfect order?'

'Thanks to the grand old dame. Little care I take in gardens.'

'Do you take greater interest in the house, Gordon?'

'I take interest in my bachelor's nook in it; the household goods are in their inflammable ghostly gowns, well filled with moth destroying powders—so I am told; but I am not sure of anything here out of my own quarters.'

'Still you have a love for the old place, and a country life?'

'Is that the question that weighs heavily? I had better not love this place. Athelstan might have a whim, and come and live here—this would upset my bachelor's nook; or the padrone himself might have a similar whim.'

'No, Gordon, rest satisfied. There are too many ghosts gliding among these walks, and filling the rooms, for me to desire to return. When you reach my age, you may see other ghosts that may associate themselves with the flower-decked arbour and your bachelor's nook, but not yet. For you this place has charms,—near your church. The hunting and shooting are all lost, but—'

Wine gave Gordon courage.

'I am a sportsman, I lose nothing that the country can give me, and I never neglect the poor.'

'They speak well of you. I had the hope you had altered your ways. Indecorous! sportsman and clergyman combined!'

'Every man has a right to his opinions. I do my duty; and you will never find my "pink" under my surplice, never!'

'I wonder what is under that half-clerical robe now?'

Mr Morgane fancied something wrong.

'As true a heart as ever beat in mortal man—hiding nothing.'

'I believe you, Gordon.'

Mr Morgane wished to have a good opinion

of his nephew, and did not wish to look too deeply below the surface.

'What weighty matter troubles you?' asked Gordon, to turn the talk from himself.

'What, have you not heard of Athelstan's *mésalliance?*'

'A faint rumour—nothing more.'

'Have you heard the name of Verge?'

'No—yes; a pretty actress; saw her in London. I remember her well. I ventured behind the scenes to hear if she had a word to say for herself without her book. Permission was granted no further. The lady was so carefully guarded, that to attack her with the most simple courteous remark was as impossible and void of success as an attack on Gibraltar with bows and arrows. My friend could not even introduce me, and he was her friend.'

Mr Morgane might have used his favourite's words, and have said, 'How cam'st thou in this pickle?' but he would not shake his faith in his nephew's goodness.

'Preach against theatres, and all levity, Gordon. I was once fascinated by the stage; it influenced me to misery. Preach against plays, though they please you; they are dangerous to the commonalty.'

'I avoid secular matters in the pulpit,' was Gordon's dry reply.

When Gordon led his uncle on towards the house, talking on general subjects, Mr Morgane turned quickly round as he was a pace or two from the entrance, and said,—

'Stop a minute. I have a word further to say about your future. Gordon, of course, you remember your cousin Clara? She—she remembers you; but it is some years since you met.'

'I remember her a child—a sort of tortoise.'

'Well, she is no tortoise. I want you to meet Clara; she is highly polished now—handsome too,—considered like me, tall, and perfect style.'

'I have no objection to meet Clara again. I dare say she was very genuine in her simplicity, as she is now, under her high polish.'

'Meet her without prejudice, Gordon. I wish this renewed acquaintance between you to lead to something like cousinly affection. Be my guest in London for as long as you like.'

'To be sure I will. I am to be your visitor, and meet Clara, and you will teach the young people *kartoffel gesprach*, and how to make love at the cosy kettledrums. I understand the hint. I will carry no prejudice with me. I will think out what my game ought to be before I begin to play it. Now, will you join my temperance party?'

Mr Morgane consented. Some of the guests had left, only six remained, surrounded by the strong scent of very fragrant coffee.

Gordon Scott was a favourite among his friends; they loved his natural, frank, jovial, off-hand way of uttering all that struck his mind at the moment. Always good-tempered; always in good health; always happy. If he were a jolly parson, only those who did not know him were offended. Nature (and she is difficult to fight against) made him a sportsman. Large-hearted and liberal, not a vice, as yet, was his. He had weaknesses: being a parson, he was not serious enough; the meaning of self-denial he did not understand. He was ordained, and took orders in the Church from interested motives and against his convictions. He was an example of a grand mistake in the choice of life. Farmer Brown and party were greatly surprised when the grave, gentleman-like Mr Morgane, with a melancholy smile and an expression of benevolent kindness, offered to give a short address—they had expected a merry burlesque—and commenced by quoting two lines,—

> 'What is the knowledge of this world's most knowing?
> What but a bubble scarcely worth the blowing.'

He continued in a melodious tone of voice, pleasing himself, boring his hearers, for half an hour, on temperance. Even Gordon could not strike fire in wit or humour, all was so grave; but he was sorry to see the good Mr Morgane in so painful a position, yet his ignorance was bliss.

CHAPTER XII.

A HOARD DESTROYED.

'Oft have we wondered how you hid in peace
A mind proportioned to such things as these;
How such a ruling spirit you could restrain,
And practise first over yourself to reign.'—WALLER.

UP the steps leading to the portico under which, more than a year ago, stood the young actress in the bright glare of gas, now passes a graceful girl elegantly attired. She had alighted from a barouche—such as the young actress had desired to possess—and was alone.

There was a stamp of sadness on her features—features that were regular and finely chiselled,—an attractive delicacy in her complexion, and a calm, expressive look of intelligence in her quiet eyes, that gave a peculiar, winning charm when she raised them to meet another's gaze. There was no gamesome brightness in them, but

a sombre brilliancy, such as the darkest sapphire gives out; there was no flash of diamond lustre. They were large, thoughtful eyes; their colour appeared to vary. When the light faced them, they were the deepest blue; when they were in shade, they appeared dark, so dark that the deep blue was unseen, and they were often mistaken for hazel. There was no vigorous elasticity in her step: that was firm, slow, and dignified. Her deportment seemed to partake of the characteristics of her mind. Dark chesnut hair clustered in short curls on her well-shaped head, that she carried with the pose of hauteur. She was tall; her figure, slender and well-proportioned; her mouth—that tell-tale feature—was compressed, but withal it was a pretty mouth, when a smile played over it, and allowed her perfectly-set teeth to steal a glimpse of daylight from their hiding-place.

This lovely girl stood under the portico, her beauty enhanced by the aid of a well-chosen toilette; the invitation to 'knock and ring' had been complied with; the door was opened quickly, and Lady Clara Percival entered the house of her uncle and guardian. She inquired if Mr Athelstan Morgane had arrived; the answer being in the negative, she decided to dismiss her carriage. She ascended the stairs slowly, entered her little room, gazed out of window vacantly over the garden in the centre

of the square, and thought out her disappointment.

Long she was in deep reverie. Suddenly she divested herself of hat and Parisian finery, carelessly threw them on a chair; then she muttered,—'Better it should be done now than later.' She locked the door, removed the key, and cautiously put the flap over the keyhole; then she unfastened a cabinet, took a box from its hiding-place, and a large packet of papers. She sat down, placed her hand on each as though she guarded sacred treasures. Many minutes passed thus. 'It is true—I feel sure it is true,' half audibly passed her lips. She hesitated still to open her valued hoard. At last decision came. The large packet disclosed letters tied up in bands, and dated, some written in a hand resembling copperplate engraving, others of later date, dashed off freely. There were bulky papers marked 'prize essay copy.' Lady Clara hesitated, but ended in placing them again among the letters. She unlocked the box, and turned it over, letting the contents fall on the table.

Odds and ends, once costly, only bearing the value of rubbish now, formed a medley of gathered treasures during past years. One relic struck her eye, marked 'His first gift, except bulls' eyes and sugar candy.' She tore the paper off; the case opened and showed the

gift consisted of two small turquoise ear-rings. These she put, with little necklets and bracelets, that long since she had outgrown the possibility of wearing, and all the little oddments, such as 'his first pipe,' etc., etc., on the heap of letters. She looked long on these love tokens, a sigh escaped her in spite of her firm resolution, and she murmured, 'So wasteful, yet it is better so.'

Her next act was to remove the greater part of the coals from the grate; she kindled a fire, and when she had cut the bands that confined the letters, she threw them one by one on the blazing wood. When they were consumed, she placed her presents of gold in the middle of the hot mass, and heaped the coals upon them, and the fire burnt brightly as it destroyed all that had grown distasteful to the proud Clara. Only one love-token she had not yet destroyed: she had saved that to suit her own purpose.

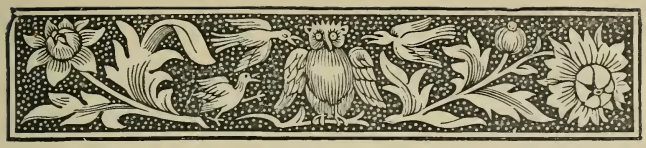
'It is true—I am sure it is true,' she repeated again and again, as the fire burned brighter and brighter.

In time the fire slackened; Lady Clara helped it to cool, removed some hot coals, and thus satisfied herself that no vestige remained of her old love tokens.

Her deep blue eyes were dry, her lips firmly compressed. It was done. No clue was left

to tell her tale. She opened the windows, that the smell of burnt paper should escape, and, with her usual firm step, left her room, and cautiously shut the door, to prevent the odour passing into the house. Then she went to her dressing-room, to prepare for an entertainment that was to take place at Magna House, given in honour of her return to England, her education having received its last touch of polish in Paris, after its more solid grounding in Germany.

Lady Clara was calm, silent, and beautiful during the making of her toilet, and she reasoned within herself the course she would take to steer her future aright. She had laid her plan; would she have the courage to make the sacrifice forced on her by herself? She was mistress of her own actions, and would brave her fate.



CHAPTER XIII.

TALK ABOUT OLD TIMES.

'Factum est illud; fieri infectum non potest.'
PLAUTUS.

ATHELSTAN was peremptorily summoned to Magna House. He obeyed as a duty. For the first time in his life he knew how difficult it was to keep even a small home without adequate means, and he desired to humour his father into making more liberal terms with him.

Dinner was over when he arrived. Nearly three hundred guests had assembled, and a symphony in B flat had just commenced when his handsome face was added to the number that were at the doorway of the music-room. Athelstan exchanged friendly nods with his old friends, then remained silent and stationary as a statue. He had not recognised Lady Clara. She was standing prominently among a group of friends. She had been listening,

now she was absorbed in that fine noble face before her. The longer she looked, the more intense became her perplexity to read his countenance aright. Was he determined not to see her? And the burning question that was exciting a contest of emotions hard to endure, 'Is the *on dit* true?' haunted her mind. She opened her large white feather fan, and hid her face behind it, just below her eyes, and fanned herself gently, and stood as statuesque as Athelstan, who was all unconscious of her presence.

Athelstan's thoughts were far away at Windermere, conning over Vera's last words—her entreaty to see his parents. She had told him her words and actions on the stage wrung tears from men, sobs from women. Could she not, with a real tale of woe, touch the hearts of parents, and awaken a feeling akin to paternal love, if not for herself, for her offspring, their grandchild? Athelstan had listened, humoured, then promised vaguely that he would moot Vera's desire if he saw a fitting opportunity.

The symphony ended, Athelstan forgot Windermere when Lady Clara went towards him. Her appearance seemed to surprise him.

'Dear Clar, so delighted to see you! How charming you look; you will cause jealousy among the London belles.'

Athelstan took her hand warmly, and smiled at his own light words.

Lady Clara was like a beautful automaton, all lifeless and cold. She was unlike other mortals: nothing seemed to come to her spontaneously or by impulse. She touched Athelstan's hand without the slightest pressure, and said,—

'Take me to have an ice. Not now; seek me when preparation is made for the next piece of music. I have something to say to you.'

'All right, dear Clar—a quiet *tête-à-tête.*'

Other ears beside Lady Clara's heard this *sotto voce* converse.

'Dear Clar' turned coldly away. Once such a greeting would have been a balm for any slight.

Athelstan, when a rover, was fair game amongst the fair; and he might have been as fickle as Phœbus, smiling here brightly, or frowning there in clouds, carrying blessings and plagues, to suit his whims,—all his Quixotic loves were forgiven at the ring of the two words; 'Dear Clar.' All this was altered. 'Dear Clar's' eyes were opened; ugly rumours had reached her that she was supplanted. 'Dear Clar' knew Athelstan's sensitive nature, and she intended he should suffer, though her pride would suffer too in causing the pain she would inflict.

The move was made to arrange for a quartette, that was the principal piece of the selection.

Athelstan sought Lady Clara.

'Take me away when I tap your arm with my fan. Not just now.'

The signal given, Lady Clara guided Athelstan into a small room. Stealthy steps followed her, and stopped at a nook that commanded a view of the room.

'Shut the door, pet,' said Lady Clara, and the cold hauteur she had assumed relaxed, and the grand mantle of dignity dropped from her shoulders now she was alone with Athelstan. Regardless of her *grande toilette*, Lady Clara threw herself into a capacious chair, and her careless elegance added a charm to her many advantages.

'Put my bouquet on the table—Gordon's present. I snubbed him, to prevent him coming to-day. He is almost a stranger, yet my cousin. Four days only have I known him, blotting out my childhood. He is too familiar, and presumes on his relationship.'

'Poor Gordon. He is an error from tip to toe. He would be equally familiar with an emperor as a sweep, and equally clever in preaching good and practising evil.'

'Really, half a god and half a demon. How despicable!' Lady Clara saw a cooler con-

taining wine. 'There is champagne, perhaps moselle. I prefer moselle. Give me a glass, and take some yourself. It will refresh us during our chit-chat.'

A few drops of moselle fell on Lady Clara's white dress, as Athelstan gave her the glass.

'An unsteady hand, Clar.'

'Then, pet, it is yours,' said Lady Clara, in her usual mode of addressing Athelstan. 'After this *faux pas*, place my chair nearer the table, and yours opposite me, and with our glasses safe on the table, we will talk of old times.'

Athelstan's bold, open, loyal nature warned him not of danger. He knew not that subtle cunning was being used to make him say that which he had intended to conceal. He dreamed he was to talk of trifles such as the old times had been filled with; but Lady Clara intended to gain all she desired from him, before she lifted the veil from the statue, that she posed for him to see and remember, to rankle in his mind and disturb his peace.

Lady Clara toyed with her fan as Athelstan obeyed her request.

'So you are glad to see me, pet, as glad as you ever were in the old times?'

'Quite; and a cosy talk is more congenial, after a long railway journey, than quartettes and sonatas.'

'Then you will stop here awhile, and accom-

pany me to entertainments—such as you used to enjoy?'

'I have given up going to all entertainments, dear Clar.'

'Have you? Then invite us all to your cottage in Westmoreland.'

Lady Clara looked at Athelstan long, with a steadfast earnestness, and the disconcertion she desired to raise attacked him visibly. She nibbled the top of her feather fan, to hide her rebelling mouth,—the lips that would not be firm and compressed, as she waited the answer to her first test question.

A wise man of old said, 'There is a foolish corner even in the brain of a sage.' Athelstan's thoughts appeared to be shut up in his foolish corner, and he could not frame a suitable reply. At last, with hesitation, came this clumsy answer,—

'My cottage is too small for you and mother; it would not hold your luggage.'

'Invite us. It cannot be smaller than our tiny cottages in the Highlands, where we have been so happy.'

By the discomfort she was causing Athelstan, the delicate, soft, winsome beauty knew her power over him. Her tone of voice was so sweet and entreating, and in old times he had never refused any request made by her; but he must meet this emergency boldly.

Athelstan's disposition was single-minded; the present influenced him alone, the past invariably became a dead letter, the future seldom entered his mind in any definite form. His secret marriage had been contracted to ensure present peace, to possess one whose fame and attractions aroused his jealousy.

At this moment, in the cosy room where he had spent with Lady Clara the only happy hours that he had enjoyed in his wearisome home, he found it difficult to tell her an untruth, and show her ingratitude. He did not look at her as he answered,—

'The cottage is larger than our Scotch cribs, but two partners share it with me.'

'They reside there always—never away?'

Lady Clara saw Althelstan's confusion, so she professed to be interested in the stain on her dress, and rubbed it with her handkerchief, looking intently on it while doing so.

'No, never away. I am afraid I have spoiled your dress by my carelessness.'

'That is nothing.' Lady Clara looked up into Athelstan's face, and a sad smile passed over her countenance; a piercing look of suppressed scorn or jealousy came to her lustrous eyes, as memory gave a retrospect of happier times; she added bitterly, 'but it is something that they, whoever they may be, have taken my place!'

'No, dear Clar, not so, indeed. Now, talk about old times; you have something to ask me?'

'Yes, pet, I have.'

Lady Clara looked with an unwavering, earnest expression in her spell-binding eyes at Athelstan's excited face, and she said calmly,—

'The *on dit* is that you are married. Is it true, pet?'

Athelstan's manner changed quickly, as he said abruptly,—

'Believe, as you like, the *on dit*. I will neither confirm nor contradict it.'

'That is a cruel answer to me. I should know your true position, even if kept secret from the world.'

A pause followed, and Lady Clara still looked steadfastly on Athelstan, and said sadly,—

'Your memory of old times, and your conscience, must remind you you have a duty at this moment to do, before the past can be cancelled between us.'

Athelstan's face had a pained expression; the dead letter of the past was being opened, and that irrevocable time was rising up against him on all sides, far more than in his present ignorance he could realise.

'Dear Clar, let us never cancel our friendship, though I neither confirm nor deny the report spread of my marriage. I was conscious

that you were the only bright being in my home when you left it; with you went the light of the house. You had been as an affectionate sister to me, ever finding means to enhance my pleasures. I am grateful to you for the only happiness I ever had in my own home.'

Athelstan's quiet bearing cut the young girl's heart keenly. She jerked her fan open to its full size, and from behind this shield she said slowly,—

'If it is not possible to tell me the truth or falsity of the report that has come to me, you can tell me if you are free. You understand me?'

Athelstan was silent. Lady Clara's face was still hidden from him, as she said,—

'I question you closely, and with reason, to satisfy myself, not the world; believe me, pet.'

'Too closely. Yet I will satisfy your curiosity but leave my marriage an open question still. I am not free, dear Clar; to you alone I acknowledge this.'

A minute longer hidden behind the fan-shield that gave Lady Clara courage to speak, 'the fear that made her bold' sufficed to allow her to discard all her pride. She had learned sufficient to decide her to play the part she had planned for herself. It pained Athelstan to grieve her, but she would voluntarily bear pain

to grieve him. It has been said, a woman actuated by love or hate will dare everything, and Lady Clara seemed at this moment to be influenced by both passions. She found the iron heart she had trusted had become like clay, and another image was impressed on it, effacing her own. Was she in time to obliterate it? If she could not, that heart should suffer.

She closed her fan and placed it on the table; her face was calm now, and her hand steady. She unfastened a locket that was a pendant from her necklace, and passed it to Athelstan, saying,—

'Open that; it is time the contents should be destroyed; but you, pet, must destroy it yourself.'

She would try if the heart were clay or iron.

Athelstan opened the locket, and saw his portrait; on the opposite side was written,—'A gift to my future wife,' in three lines, as an inscription. A wise man would have said these words, not have written them; but there they existed, a proof of folly.

'I—I do not remember this.'

Athelstan turned the locket over curiously.

'Not in that shape. The likeness was your parting present when I left England nearly two years ago.'

'I remember; but the writing—that strange—'

'That was on the back of the miniature, pet, and I arranged it as you see.'

'Yes, Clar dear, we often had these little jokes.'

'A serious joke, a misleading joke, a wicked joke! Can all the past have been a joke, Athelstan?—a joke on one side, and a serious fact on the other?'

Athelstan felt Lady Clara's fearfully powerful eyes were upon him. He tried to laugh off his position, and said, as he looked again at his own miniature,—

'But, Clar dear, this is of no value. I gave poor Malton, that ne'er-do-well artist, seven pounds for painting it.'

'Do not joke longer. If you think it well to take your likeness out of the locket and destroy it, do so seriously. Old times make me value it far too highly to do it myself, and I leave it to your conscience, to your principles of right and wrong, helped by your knowledge of the past, to act as becomes an honest man.'

Athelstan, with a penknife, removed his likeness and the writing; he split the ivory into minute pieces, and tore the paper up, then he placed the locket, without word of regret or comment, on the table.

Seeing this fatal act accomplished—fatal to the hopes Athelstan had raised in her, and finding this last appeal to honour and principle thus answered, assured Lady Clara that her

rival was all-powerful, ruling his decision, she accepted her condition, but she would not suffer alone. Mildly and sorrowfully she said,—

'Thus you destroy my peace. Why did you let me devote to you, in all-absorbing power, every tender feeling that a susceptible heart can give?—and for a joke! For a joke you cause me bitterness! For a joke you destroy my future happiness! For a joke, Athelstan? No, in the old days you played no joke. Your kind, noble, gentle heart would have spurned such cruelty—revolted against such meanness. You meant every kind word you said and wrote. I have no misgivings. I have no regret that that time existed—a small consolation. But, mark me, Athelstan, that time will be the bright speck of our existence, that we shall look back upon in years to come, if long life gives us a chance of retrospection. I have no regret, though the result is unfortunate, for the old times were happy to you and to me; the new will be—'

Athelstan interrupted Lady Clara, saying,—

'Our lives are *in futuro*, our hopes, though wide apart, must be there too, dear Clar.'

Athelstan felt he should not add to the sorrow of the proud beauty, who had humbled herself in saying all she had. He could not exonerate himself from fault. He had been guilty of forgetting the girl whose peace of mind for the moment he had disturbed. He

wished to end this scene; he was pained that Lady Clara was grieved, and Byron's lines illustrate his state of mind,—

> 'She loved me and I loved her—fatal passion!
> Why dost thou not expire *at once* in hearts
> Which thou hast lighted up at once? Zarina!
> I must pay dearly for the desolation
> Now brought upon thee.'

'You must not be weak, dear Clar; young affections are capricious, even sudden love comes without reflection; more matured affections, such as will come to you, follow reflection. Replace my miniature by one of a better man, whose kind hand will support you through, I trust, a happy life. I am lost to you; this loss must not make your life empty of joy, and love, and peace.'

'Yes, pet, I will do this. I will put my future husband's likeness there—it may be tomorrow—but I shall not love him.'

Lady Clara took the locket from Athelstan, and clasped it on her necklet as she spoke.

'Do nothing rash.'

'No, pet; I shall only become a hollow sham. I do not resent your injury to me; I take it philosophically; it happened in the course of events. I left England, and you forgot me. I return to England, and I shall marry a man I hate. I accept the decree as ordained; my burden shall be carried with a stout heart; you and I only shall know its weakness and its misery.'

'Dear Clar, why plant the seeds of wretchedness in me? I never heard a woman talk as you do.'

'It had been well had you never given one occasion to talk so; but that is over,' said Lady Clara sadly. Yet she had gained her point. Athelstan's question showed her she could sow the seed of wretchedness in him—that seed she would not allow to die; if needed, she would water it with her tears from time to time, to fructify its growth and give it poignancy, and add a keen, piercing, bitter power to her sardonic, hideous revenge. She would not suffer alone. Her success in giving him misery seemed to curdle the flow of her better thoughts into a congealed mass of grim, terrible, unholy vengeance. She had gained proof she had been the victim of a captivating cheat.

> 'So fades a summer cloud away;
> So sinks the gale when storms are o'er;
> So gently shuts the eye of day;
> So dies a wave along the shore,
> Yet to return.'

So may good return to Lady Clara.

Lady Clara Percival was satisfied; she had gained two points—the knowledge that Athelstan was entrammelled, whether by marriage or engagements she had had no definite decision, and she had done her best to unsettle his peace. Her task was finished for this day—thus she

thought as she rose from her chair. She heaved a heavy sigh involuntarily, a sigh she could not repress; her lips quivered, in spite of all effort to subdue her feeling. She could not put on the grand mantle of cold dignity yet, it is true, but she would presently, and wear it with grace.

'Dear Clar, this evening will soon give place to morning; over each morning pends a day's mystery that is not solved till night; joy may come quickly. I will do all in my power to repair this error.'

'It is irreparable! Fill my glass with Moselle, please pet.' The wine gave strength, and Lady Clara swallowed her tears, and said abruptly,—'Pet, one word before we put the barrier of restraint and formality between us. I must see your wife. I am sure now Miss Verge is your wife; pet, let me see her.'

'If it is possible,' Athelstan replied, without caution; 'but to what purpose?'

'I will make it possible; my purpose you shall know from her. Be careful—very careful. Your secret marriage is now known to me. Your father has given vague hints; though vague, I understand them now most clearly. I am keen, pet, I am silent, and have gathered much. He is scheming to ruin you—you, his son. Do not press him to recognise your marriage more than he has; keep it dark from the world, and you may be safe. He wor-

ships the world, whilst he fancies he worships God.'

'Ruin. What ruin can he contemplate?'

'I surmise only, so should not speak my thoughts. I shall profit in your ruin; that, pet, I foresee. But if I have to take the diamonds off my head to serve you, they shall be yours, and all my means shall be at your disposal. I will be your friend till death.'

'Dear, good, generous Clara!'

Althelstan's feelings were more deeply touched as he saw the shadow of the mischief that might realise Lady Clara's forebodings. He thought of Vera,—of the pleading face he had left at Windermere. This saddened him. She, too, had been so generous, so self-denying for him, yet she had been the cause of all the ills that were besetting him. His train of thought unmanned him; he hastily buried his face in his hands to regain composure, and the generous Clara looked on him, in a sad way enjoying his anguish.

Lady Clara's firmness was with her now, and beautiful she looked; she desired to be attractive at this moment, and the fine, arched brow, the classic shaped head encircled by a band of brilliants, the proud mouth, fitted well the tall, symmetrical figure draped with studied elegance.

When Athelstan's fit of depression left him, and he looked up and met Lady Clara's eyes gazing on him in their deep, lustrous beauty,

their old power came over him that had made him her obedient slave; this peculiar influence was upon him. He should have resisted the charm of her beauty—he should—but, alas! he was weak.

Athelstan made a false move, and said,—

'Do not add to my ills. Clara, forgive me the injury I have done you: that is in your power. Let me feel that we misunderstood each other.'

'Freely I forgive, but shall never forget our dear old days.'

Lady Clara went towards the door to open it.

'Now we part friends, Clara; it is better so.'

'Part.' A sickly smile came over Lady Clara's face. 'We shall not part yet. On the other side of this door begins our new life—new to me. The first test of strength will be when we sing our duet.'

'Sing—it will put me on the rack to sing.'

'You must endure. Be warned. Your father is like a techy child; if you refuse to sing, it will be deemed an insult to him; he is looking for a *faux pas* on your part. Be careful. I have given the hint—be wise. I will go; my absence may be noticed.'

Lady Clara left Athelstan alone, and passed by the guest who still occupied the settee in the recess; she gave no heed to him, and, passing on, she met Gordon Scott, who had just arrived at Magna House.

'Am I to meet a frown or smile? I said I

would come at any risk. *Tête-à-tête* with Athelstan, eh?'

Lady Clara looked searchingly in Gordon's face, as she said,—

'Who told you?'

'Your uncle.'

'Oh! Take me to the music-room, Gordon; the quartette is not ended.'

'Thanks, Clara, for that small favour. I construe that to mean a smile. After all, lovers' quarrels are moonshine.'

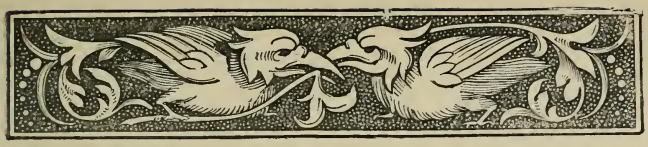
'Who are the lovers?'

Gordon put his hand on hers that was upon his arm, and looked into the depths of her deep blue eyes, and Clara smiled on him, and he was happy.

Athelstan saw this. Was this the man Lady Clara hated? Was this her *fiancé*, who might be introduced to the world to-morrow? Was this the man who might supplant him? These ugly questions haunted him, and rendered him uneasy. When he entered the music-room, he saw Lady Clara merry among a group of friends; her talk was reckless and excited. 'Better grow into a coquette than become the wife of Gordon,' suggested itself to his mind. He was surprised, after a while, by Lady Clara putting her arm in his, saying in a cheery voice,—

'Pet, our duet is next.'

She was strong enough to use laughter 'to drown the outcry of the heart.'



CHAPTER XIV.

A BREAKFAST *TÊTE-À-TÊTE.*

'Amoret! my lovely foe,
Tell me where thy strength does lie?
Where the power that charms us so?
In thy soul or in thy eye.'—WALLER.

ATHELSTAN already felt an alien in his father's house. When he awoke in his old room, the walls decorated by his mother's hand with framed texts, and pictures of Joseph and his Brethren and such subjects, and where he had placed the last whim of the hour, the season's beauty in long skirts, the ballet girl in short skirts, himself and his pet dog, one of the 'fancy' with his pet dog, a bishop, a prima donna, his mother, a racehorse, etc. etc. All old friends, yet they hang as strangers, staring at him in their incongruous arrangement. His down pillows were hard, they were the property of a rich man who had reduced him to poverty, and,

as his head pressed them, he was perplexed by the shadows of the future.

He remembered Lady Clara's warning, his interview with her, and now, not under the influence of her beauty, he doubted if he had ever loved her; sure he was that he did not regret he had made Vera his wife. He was not a man to repent and repine, but he was sorely troubled by gloomy prospects. Thrifty Vera, with care and vigilance, industry and economy, failed to keep her balance even. Then, for Vera's sake, he must not show the independent spirit that was innate in him; he must be governed by the prejudices of his father, rather than by his own convenience,—put himself under the lash of a tyrant than claim a right.

Can he—will he bend to this? Cicero has truly said that 'to alter the disposition is difficult, and that which is deeply implanted in our nature to suddenly root out.' Can frankness become cunning? Can honour be guised in deception? Athelstan knew little of himself; it would be difficult to him to be even 'nobly false.'

As Athelstan was making mental notes in a dreamy way, a slight rap, and a low voice saying, 'Look under your door,' disturbed him. He followed instructions, and picked up the card that had been thrust under the door, and read on it these words, 'An hour hence go to

my boudoir. I invite you to breakfast with me. Written 6 A.M.—CLARA.'

At the appointed time Athelstan went to Clara's room; she was not there to receive him. On the breakfast-table was a little heap of scraps of paper, and as Athelstan waited Clara's arrival he fitted the pieces of paper together, as though he were playing with a puzzle. He was vacant in mind, his thoughts were rambling in confused order, not one was given to the writing that was being made intelligible in purport and sense, as he placed bit after bit in order; the last bit fitted, he leaned back in his chair, yawned, and was conscious he had had a sleepless night, and, *mirabile dictu*, sat before the plainly-developed writing, and read not a word of it.

Lady Clara entered the room, put her hands on his shoulders; this startled him, for his back was towards the door.

'Ah, pet, I thought you were above that.'

'Above what, dear Clar?'

'I generally burn my scraps.'

'Indeed—indeed I do not know a word written there,' and Athelstan was about to scatter the pieces.

'Let that be,' and Lady Clara stayed his hand, as she looked steadfastly in his face. 'I am bound to believe you have not read a word; if you had, it would have made my task easier.

I have been to seek advice; my views have been strengthened, and that writing carries the import of my wishes and doings. Leave it. Let us make our kettle boil. I hope you still drink tea; it is the only beverage I can brew up here.' Lady Clara lighted two spirit-lamps, placed a kettle over one and an egg-boiler over the other. 'Now, pet, when these creatures begin to hiss, put the eggs in, time them, something under five minutes, then make the tea.'

'What does Athelstan say?' asked Mrs Morgane, when Lady Clara met her in her dressing-room.

'Nothing,' was Lady Clara's laconic reply.

'Nothing!'

'Well, aunt, I must feel my way before I tell him all you wish him to know.'

'I have lost all my tact and influence, I suppose. I am old and ugly.'

Mrs Morgane was crying bitterly; she had a deep, long-kept secret held with her husband, and her suspicions were aroused concerning the plans he intended to carry into effect. She conned over every word he said, and formed conclusions from the shadows that he allowed to be sometimes visible, and to a certain point had made her niece her confidante.

'I am determined not to look ugly, aunt, so do school yourself to self-restraint; crying is infectious.'

'Ah, Clara, I was not educated to move about like an automaton without a heart! If that were necessary, why are we not born educated—or let it come—just as we cut our teeth?'

Lady Clara made no answer. She had studied Athelstan's character, and tried to educate her tastes to his. At the zenith of her expectations, the whole fabric of her life was annihilated in a breath, and she foresaw that ruin would be the lot of her vanished idol, so tears would be infectious; her wrung-heart with difficulty mastered them. Her glass told her she was flushed, but still beautiful; she would not mar that beauty.

'You have seen Father Cleon; what does he say?'

'Nothing.'

'Be more explicit, Clara.'

'He has faith in the strength of paternal affection; this makes him hopeful that my uncle may be ruled by that, and not allow his anger to make him commit acts that would outrage natural feelings in disowning Athelstan.'

'Vain words! Vain words!'

Another fit of sobbing seized Mrs Morgane, but Clara left her, and joined Athelstan.

'It is important that I should see you before you meet your father.'

'What is the question now raised, Clar, dear?'

'Not one that I can tell at the moment.

We will talk it out whilst we breakfast. Pet, where are the eggs?'

'In the egg-boiler, see; I forgot them; they must have over-boiled themselves. How early you were out this morning.'

'On your account, pet.'

'Mine!'

'I wish to befriend you. I have consulted a man of powerful intellect about a whim I had. I did not wish to ruin your life, as you have my breakfast. Look, the eggs are as hard as iron.'

'And your joke is hard too, Clar. Now, tell me why you have consulted a third person about the ills that may overtake me—even my ruin!'

Lady Clara's transient pink flush heightened, and her winsome truth-telling eyes met the frank yet anxious expression of Athelstan's face, and she said firmly,—

'To avert it.'

The spell was on him again. Had Clara but had a squinting eye, it would have sufficed to have killed the charm.

Lady Clara ate her hard egg, and Athelstan savoury meats, and they talked, and in their talk they commenced to add drop by drop a bitterness to their existences.

'So good of you to interest yourself in my concerns. Dear Clar, you convince me that I must be cautious. Yes, I am almost convinced.'

Lady Clara had made herself Mrs Morgane's mouthpiece, and had delivered her charge.

'Almost! Have I not quite?'

'Not quite, Clara. I have yet a heart that makes me dread to become a brute.'

'You are happy then at Windermere with your wife?'

'Truly and perfectly happy.'

'And your wife is satisfied with her position?'

'No, Clar; but well I know that caution is better than repentance. For Vera's sake, I am loath to believe there is no way out of this dilemma than at the sacrifice of her peace of mind.'

'More noblemen than one have married actresses, and not until after death has the secret been divulged.'

'Noblemen! That is too cowardly and mean. I will impose nothing further on Vera than delay until a fitter time to let her assume the name that is her right.'

'That is well. I am commissioned to tell you, pet, something that may come as a sudden blow; still I will go through all I have undertaken. The day you own your wife publicly you will be disowned by your father to his very name. Without money and name, where are your advantages in this world?'

'That is too far; my name is my birthright. You mistake the law on that subject.'

'I do not mistake the importance that is attached to the message I have given you.'

'A scare to frighten the weak. The wise man you have consulted will tell you that.'

'He tells me, under certain conditions, it is possible.'

'Under none known to me. Did he specify any?'

Lady Clara looked very thoughtful, at length she said,—

'He specified one; and said that some people carry their secrets to the grave, and they are buried for ever there.'

Athelstan looked thoughtful now. Clara's words struck him strangely.

'I will consult my mother,' he said, after a pause.

'She has strictly forbidden you to mention a word to her on this subject, pet; she has put me in her place.'

Athelstan leaned his head on his hand, and after long undisturbed thought said abruptly,—

'Pen and ink, Clar dear, I will write to my father.'

In his mind he had arranged compactly and lucidly all he might ask as a son; but his mind outstripped his pen—he omitted this, he erased that; finally he threw down his pen exclaiming,—

'Oh, that a man would invent a process that would keep pace with one's mind—that one

could stamp one's thoughts clear from the brain at the moment, and supersede the lagging, fagging pen. Thoughts fly away not to be recalled.'

'A little reflection is good, pet. Be warned. Hear all your father has to say, but say nothing yourself. He is the mainspring, the fly-wheel that drives our hopes; follow suit to the whirl. Your mechanism must fit his, or our scheme will not work.'

'I have to wait to hear his whim, the hearing postponed *sine die*. Thanks, Clar, for all the interest you have taken in me.' Athelstan left the table and looked out of the window vacantly. After a long pause he asked, 'Who is the man you have consulted?'

'Father Cleon. He is in England, and is my guide and adviser in all things.'

'A lawyer is better than a priest in my case, Clar, though he may be a shrewd man of his cloth. His influence is useful to prevent my worst fears for you being realised. You will never bear the name of Scott.'

'Read those scraps of paper, as they lay there; you will learn something I wish you to know, but I dare not tell you.'

Athelstan read line after line; then Lady Clara burned the paper that had told her tale concisely, pathetically, and clearly.

'You intend to marry a man you hate for my sake! Explain.'

'The future may, pet.'

'This is a bitter wrong to him and yourself, Clar; think less lightly on this subject.'

'I live only for you—to serve you. I will marry to serve you. But Gordon and I are on even ground.'

'He must love you.'

'I exerted myself to attract his love. Yes, I would be loved; judge if I am. I spoke of my change in religion, he answered me in this couplet,—

> "Bell, book, and candle shall not drive me back,
> When gold and silver beck me come on."

I think we are equal, pet. I have put one and one together—the result, a pair of interested mortals, intent on forming a *mariage de convenance*. Breakfast over, let me once again warn you to wait better days, and postpone the deed that will hasten your ruin. See, I have good courage, and leave you with the means of staving off a known evil.'

Lady Clara left Athelstan with a smile, and returned to her dressing-room. Mrs Morgane was no longer there. When alone she cried and sobbed *ad libitum*, and refused to see anyone; she was fatigued, hysterical, and desired rest. Three days passed before she joined her family; then her eyes were as clear as ever, and her voice had a ring of glee in it, as if her heart were at ease.

CHAPTER XV.

A PATRIOT AND HIS WIFE.

'He that studieth revenge keepeth his own wounds green.'
BACON.

'What constitutes a State?
Not high-raised battlement or labour'd mound,
Thick wall, or moated gate,
. . . . . .
Nor starr'd and spangled courts,
Where low-brow'd baseness wafts perfume to pride.
No:—MEN, high-minded MEN.
. . . . . .
Men who their Duties know,
But know their Rights, and knowing, dare maintain.
. . . . . .
And crush the tyrant, while they rend the chain:
These constitute a State.'—SIR W. JONES.

'IT is late, mother, for you to walk alone to Skelwith; it will be dark before you return. Let me go with you.'

'My child, you have been saddened by seeing your husband's vacant chair for a whole week; as he returns to-day, do not

let his welcome be an empty room. I shall return without fear.'

With these words Madame Verge left Vera and the cottage, but not to walk to Skelwith. She turned off in the direction of a magnificent wooded hill, commanding a view of lake, hill, and dale—a combination that the afternoon sun threw a charm over, and cast a darkened hue on the heathy patches, where strips of green sward gleamed in lighter, brighter shades, intermingling and harmonising with the oaks and beeches, and grand old trees and tender saplings, that studded the land in picturesque solitary singleness, and in belts of thick forest growth.

Half way up this hill Madame Verge met the object of her lonely walk. A man of middle age was resting on a seat placed for weary travellers; he watched her nearing him, they met affectionately, and walked still further up the hill together, and in this rural paradise talked as Adam and Eve might, when life was new to them, of themselves and of each other, and no thought beyond troubled them.

They had now walked far enough out of any beaten track, and they rested on a high mound, and their conversation was different from any that Adam or Eve could have held. It was on a subject that converts paradise into hell, peace into war, love into hatred, if urged by too pressing a force. The conversation was held in the

Polish tongue, and that part that interests most commenced, when this observation was made to Madame Verge,—

'This is the anniversary of your birth and of our marriage. What is now your age?'

'Dearest Demetrius—'

'Hush,' and the man looked round quickly, fearing enemies.

'No fear, only the birds hear. I love to call you by a name that has been dead to me for years; and in those years what a tale can be told! But, Demetrius, this is not telling you my age. I am thirty-six, and nineteen years ago I became your wife.'

'So many years is it? When I looked in Vera's face it took me back nineteen years. She recalled to memory all that you were. I was deeply touched.'

'Demetrius, I was her age when we parted, and you joined that miserable insurrection.'

'Vera,—you named her your own name; that was well. She has your features, that have much softness, not the energy of heroism, but bearing in them love for home life.'

'Have compassion on yourself and on me; let us live in a home anywhere in England, or any country of your choice.'

Demetrius made no answer, his life had made him taciturn and cautious.

'See, you are now a grandfather, half a

century old, surely time to court rest and safety.'

'Half a century! and so little done! Born 1815; now it is 1864. I am but forty-nine—young enough to aid in advice. But I am skilled in languages, can clothe passages with double meanings, that, as a writer, makes me valuable to any cause and party; as a medium, as a dispassionate reasoner, and as an ardent urger to reform abuses, I hold an influential position; and above all, the name I have assumed has no taint of prison; the papers I hold are genuine. I can play my part safely—give no anxious thought of danger to me; I have none for myself.'

'Let me share your lot and future fortune, be it good or evil.'

'That is impossible. Peter Rimboff never married. Drawing-rooms would be closed to you; my important plans are often hatched there. Your presence would be my only danger. It is hard to deny you, but it is imperative. I must be free.'

'There is no law that Peter Rimboff should not marry. I can be a bride again.'

'Impossible. I go on my errand alone—if untrammelled I am safe. I have still a debt unpaid; I will pay it; in truth, I swear I will.'

'Forget the past, Demetrius. Look round you at nature's peaceful beauties, and say

honestly it were better to live amidst them, calm and contented, than to agitate a mob and set a mass in motion, that may cause greater mischief and suffering than you seek to cure.'

'Such are the thoughts engendered by living in free England. If Englishmen were under the lash of despotism, think you that they would not rise against oppression? But his home is sacred, his speech free; he feels he has a place in his nation, a voice that can declare by free vote for his representative in the state; a free press. Happy, thrice happy, subject of the British monarch! Let him never abuse his advantages. Let him be satisfied; the good man may be unmolested, unsuspected master of himself; the law-breaker alone feels the rod of punishment, and that punishment is administered by law and justice. But there are other nations, Vera, that groan yet under the hand of tyranny; it is time moral force were used to stay oppression, and teach rulers the law of civilisation. And besides, I have revenge still burning fiercely in my heart.'

'Seek no revenge. Compare an individual's weakness with the power of a state. Be oppressed no more; leave the oppressors.'

'Were I a woman, I would. Individuals combined form a state. Cannot a combination be incited that will become strong enough to reason with that state; let the despot see that

he rules with weapons of the past—that his sole will is the plague-spot in his empire—that his feeble mind is sapped by hirelings and underlings, who grow rich by speculation, who, verily oppress him, and crush his people in his name? Granted all who are oppressed are weak, yet all who are strong are not oppressors. Civilisation has given equal rights to the giant and the dwarf, as it has given the same to the governor and the governed. The giant may not strangle the dwarf because he has the power so to do, if he be in his way; nor the governor tyrannise over the governed, exile, banish, confiscate, and rob—taking might as right. The cry of the weak is still unheard. Is this civilisation?' Demetrius's excitement made his low voice tremble. 'My Vera,' he said, more calmly, 'I have a duty to perform—a duty to my fellow-creatures. I have not yet rolled my philosopher's cloak around me, and with peace in my eye looked on wrongs, thinking calmly such things must be; endure, and smile under endurance. Nay, I may kick against the pricks, yet I will kick. Have I forgotten my mother, of noble lineage, abused, with head shaven, ridiculed, and insulted, by order of a Grand Duke, who possessed an ungovernable temper? Are nations to be governed by good or bad tempers? Vera, reflect; in free England who cares if her monarch is amiable or ferocious;

the happiness of her people depends on no caprice. Powerful as the monarch is, that monarch is powerless to shave the head of a sweep's wife. That monarch has laws to respect,—safeguards to the monarch as to the monarchy. That is all we Nihilists ask in a National Assembly. It is not given to the capacity of *one* man to rule a nation happily and justly: in such a lone position he is impotent to rule himself. Hence our misery. Hence his fears, that make him tremble even in his sleep, and ever, when ruling, hold a rod, instead of the sceptre of peace. A nation cannot always bow to this!'

'Dearest Demetrius, your words startle me. You have been severely chastened; forgive—time is not ripe for all you wish.'

'Never will be, if the wish is allowed to perish. Yes, the smart of the rod is still with me, but I brave all. I believe in my right-doing and my duty.'

'Your duty is done. Demetrius, be content; your life has been a series of martyrdoms.'

'Content! The remembrance of my troubled life calls me to avenge my injuries—in other words, to make it impossible for other lives to be sacrificed as mine and thousands have been. Forty-nine years ago, when I was in my cradle, peace was to hover over our unfortunate land for ever. Our charter of

freedom was abused. I was but a lad, had reached my ninth year, when the first personal unhappiness overtook me. I remember my father being forcibly taken from his house in the dead of night, that he should not use his powerful voice, according to his just rights, in debate at the opening of the Diet. An outrage yet unavenged.'

'Such acts are unheard of now, Demetrius.'

'Unheard of in England, and there is no Diet of Warsaw now.'

A ghastly laugh followed these words.

'Yes, Vera, I remember the past—there are thousands who remember the past too—that is not yet all in oblivion. I can recall to mind the unholy action sanctioned under the greatest of misnomers, the "Holy Alliance," when the principles of Christian charity, upon which it was founded, were interpreted to mean, suspicion of the innocent, false accusations, confiscations, and diabolical punishments for all who were in the way of the ruling powers. Parties often change sides: they who hold scourges are scourged with their own weapons.

'Demetrius, I have never heard you speak thus before!'

'My good wife, you have now heard my unbridled tongue. I have been reticent from motives of mercy to you; but now, on the eve

of my leaving England, it is time to throw off the mask, that we may understand our positions. Understand, my dear Vera, within me exists the same strong patriotism that led me when a lad to join our military school, and swell the cry—"Women, home; men to arms." Ah! that was in the autumn. How well I recall how heart and hand I played my small part in the time that followed. My patriotism has not grown weaker. Ay, I feel a lad again! The chagrin of that crushing disappointment that followed our efforts, when the Muscovite put his coarse iron hoof on our tender flesh, when he trampled out all prosperity, and stamped in misery and ruin in our ill-fated land, has lost none of its bitterness. The name of our country is blotted out, but a remnant of her children exist, scattered and weakened, loving freedom and justice, and willing to lay down life for both—yes, yes, I feel a lad again! the same boiling, undefinable excitement comes to me with my liberty; but now, as then, my head is cool; what I will do, I will do with judgment. Formerly Russia had one Poland to subdue, now she has made a Poland of Russia. Can an autocrat face that? You tremble, Vera, yet you are a Polish woman on your mother's side.'

'For your life I tremble, my own Demetrius.'

'My dearest wife, we think not to beard the

lion in his den. It is not men to arms we now cry, it is moral pressure we force on; no life is endangered; our foes are only they who frustrate civilisation; our strongest weapon against them is the pen.'

'Remember Siberia and banishment still exist. Stop with me.'

'And tyranny and oppression exist. Painful as it is to part from you, Vera, yet no happiness would come to me, even in England, until the backbone of despotism is broken.'

'You are far too noble to be sacrificed in dislocating joints that are so toughly knit together, that they must be dissected one by one before the structure gives way; and Demetrius, in that course you risk banishment; and an escape from Siberia is not possible. Has prison life no horrors for you?'

'Recall them not.' Demetrius was long silent, and his countenance grew sad. His wife deemed she had played a winning card; she would try another of the same suit.

'You have yet to tell me of the pains your prison days caused you to endure, and how you effected your escape; tell me now, whilst I pillow my head upon your breast, and try to realise bitter hardships nobly surmounted.'

Demetrius put his arm around his wife's waist, and drew her close to him, and upon her head that rested on his breast, he leaned his

own. Words, that could be translated, 'Cruel necessity,' he whispered half involuntarily; but a bitter feeling was in him, perhaps greater than was in Cromwell when he uttered them over the headless body of Charles the First.

'I will not torture you; do not try to satisfy me; if the days past are so painful to recall, you are too wise to court their recurrence.'

'I answered my own reflections a passing thought, dear wife, your request,—it was—well, what was it?'

'To hear how you escaped from your prison.'

'I am under a solemn oath, that will ever cause the history of my life to be untold. The plan of my escape, my vicissitudes in carrying it out, must be a secret, strictly kept from the world. An untimely word might endanger many; for, let the censors be as active as bees, spreading their toils far and wide, news travels apace withal.'

'You can trust me, Demetrius.'

'Not until we touch the goal,—Liberty. To frustrate that end, obstructions may be built up, but to little purpose. As well try to dam a fast flowing river on its way to the ocean, as to restrain the powerful stream that flows on to liberty; new rivulets will and must break bounds and ooze onwards; these rivulets must be jealously guarded and kept in strictest

silence; a vigilant watch kept on their course until they reach the wished-for goal. That goal touched, Vera, you shall hear my life; the world shall know who the great men and women are who people Siberia, and who have languished in prison,—the flower of a nation, commingled with felons and low criminals. Liberty gained, then will I bow my head in loyal submission before the monarch who may sustain it and reign over a happier people. To turn the autocrat's iron rod into a monarch's sceptre, burdened with justice, is the end to which I have consecrated my life. You will help me, by yet being my widow, by keeping my true name silent, by writing to me never, except in answer to my letters, in keeping a brave heart, and a bright hope for success, and for our future peaceful life.'

'Ah! Demetrius, I know to my cost, my words against your strong will are but as the peck of doves on the falcon's piercing talons—years of imprisonment and banishment have no greater power to weaken your patriotism; would you were as weak as Athelstan, who still yields to his father more than he has a right to claim. Would I could influence you; but alas! alas!'

Demetrius was silent; he treated his wife's words as a choke-pear. Yet he might have defended himself by expressing such sentiments

as are contained in Byron's curt, telling lines:—

> 'Have I not had my brain sear'd, my heart riven,
> Hopes sapp'd, name blighted, life's life lied away?
> And only not to desperation driven
> Because not altogether of such clay
> As rots into the souls of those whom I survey.'

Madame Verge, in that silence, fancied she saw a turning point in her destiny. Had she prevailed? At the eleventh hour, would love of home supersede the love of political liberty? Hope was rife, anxiety keen, and feelings oscillated between joy and fear. Her head was still nestled on her husband's shoulder, and it still pillowed his; near as they were, no two brains were further apart in accord. He had no regret that he had entangled himself in the complication of illegal commissions in a secret society, or that he had inflamed the minds of young men with the views he held on despotism, in subtile lectures and fine-spun arguments.

His thoughts were on the silent living world, that secrecy, 'the soul of all great designs,' makes strong; which has its being *sub rosa;* whose members must be *sans peur et sans reproche;* whose aims are unselfish and for a common good; whose subtility is so fine that influence is worked unseen, unheard, but known; whose stealthy steps traverse society, and society dreams not that they are near. In this almost

invisible world each member is a hero, full of energy, and devoted to the cause; no fanatic, sick of life, who requires a stimulant to invigorate to action; no reckless champion of liberty gains admittance in this world. The morbid sentimentalist is soon discovered in contradistinction to the true patriot, and he never passes the ordeal of oath or membership; this alone is given to robust minds, honest and conscientious, reliable and truthful, brave, and with the good of his fellows ever at heart, and the development of freedom and justice ever his aim.

Demetrius Krainsky thought of this world that was working for his ideal, and in which he held a high position; his mind wandered from the dark to the new world of society that had admitted him within its bounds under a false name.

Demetrius Krainsky was missing, then the *on dit* was rife that he was dead, and from his ashes rose Peter Rimboff.

It was thus Demetrius Krainsky died.

Disguised as a priest, long tunic and round cap, Demetrius Krainsky passed the frontier after his escape from prison under the guidance of his friend. He travelled in the same public conveyance with Peter Rimboff. Conversation commenced between them, thus a slight intimacy followed, and they decided to put up at

the same hotel. A sudden illness attacked Rimboff. For two days Demetrius Krainsky was his companion and nurse at his request; the third day Rimboff died. A man not long escaped from prison was not slow to take advantage of so fortunate an incident. How easy for an exchange of passports; how easy for the priest to die and Rimboff to live. Alone had Demetrius attended to his wants, and heard his last request; and alone saw him die.

The priest was not encumbered with luggage, but Rimboff had much, and many papers, and a name untainted. Soon an exchange was made —the dead man lived, and the living man strived to obliterate all traces of himself. The priest's robe and hat Krainsky placed in the room with the corpse, the thick boots he threw by the bedside, he saw that the underclothing worn by Rimboff was unmarked, so he left the priest; now he must make himself Rimboff. He soon appropriated Rimboff's clothes, together with his name and papers, and before the warmth of life had given place to the icy coldness of death, Peter Rimboff, *alias* Demetrius Krainsky, raised the cry that the poor priest was dead. No time had he to await the day of burial, but with the appearance of generosity he paid the expenses necessary for a decent funeral, and the outstanding sum due to the manager of the hotel. This he accomplished

with the dead man's money, and a considerable amount was still intact, ample for his own immediate necessaries, to which he quickly applied it.

With light heart, under the name of Peter Rimboff, Demetrius Krainsky went on his journey, in the contrary direction to his previous plan. He had intended to avoid Lithuania; it was his birth-place, but now that he had a clear and distinct identity in name, a just right to live free from espionage, he could not restrain the desire to revisit the spot that was associated with his earliest recollections and dearest associations.

Demetrius had found a valuable hoard among the relics of the dead. Rimboff had a collection of newspaper cuttings of all the leading events that were allowed by the censors to meet the public eye; from these Demetrius learned much to enlighten his ignorance of the world, from which he had been banished many years. Added to this prize, he found another of equal value. Rimboff had kept a journal—this proved him a good and bold man; and from these useful jottings Demetrius could glean the mode of his life, his characteristics, and friends. Thus primed, Demetrius entered Lithuania well informed in news of past and current times. Suspicion that he was himself was not roused even when he went among his few old friends.

A few only remained, for so many had shared a similar fate to his own, and Lithuania was no longer their home.

The only disguise that Demetrius assumed was an artificially-darkened complexion. Rimboff was a dark man, but he was unknown in Lithuania, except in name, and the brown mask was needed to obliterate all trace of Demetrius rather than to assume the appearance of Peter Rimboff.

The time had arrived when Demetrius realised that he was safe and free—a time he never dreamed would have existed in the future for him; it was a new life—a new experience. In his prison he had known solitude—a painful solitude hard to bear; in it he had fumed and foamed, had paced his cell in a frame of mind bordering on madness. He had dreaded the agony of night, the wanderings of his mind to happier days, and the irresistible melancholy feelings that followed. He was a man with no thought of superstition, nor was he imaginative; yet in the deep darkness of night, had he been conscious of spectral visions; he had seen ghosts, heard sighs and moans, laughter and voices. He had conversed with beings of the supernatural world, and they with him; but they vanished when daylight came, and the terrors of the night left too. When the time came that these delusions remained with him during the

day, he knew his solitude was making serious havoc in his health, and he began to dread his days as much as his nights. He tried to treat this matter philosophically, but philosophy would not cure the disease; and he experienced the miseries attending a long illness in prison. But health returned to him, and after a while severe discipline was relaxed; but his life was hard, yet not so solitary as hitherto. The intensity of his feelings often made him clinch his hands, and caused a sneer to move his features in defiance and anger against his fate and oppressors. He had no enmity against his jailers—and some dared to be kind to him in little ways, in breaking small rules to add to his comfort; but the vigilance of the higher authorities over him irritated him, and gave him cause to think his life would always be sacrificed to prison routine.

He was taken from one prison to another. He had grown taciturn, but his mind was wakeful, and ever watching events around him. Then he welcomed his hours of solitude not as a torture, nor to fume away in hate and rage, but in which to muse on new ideas. He had listened to tales of miseries greater than his own; he had lost all selfish thought of his own sufferings; his brain was heated with a noble longing to discover how much or little he could accomplish to alleviate these pains and penalties. Only

one man he made his confidant—who left the prison with his secret, and befriended him in his escape. His conscience bade him make no friends within the prison walls. As he planned alone, so would he suffer or succeed alone.

Success attended him. He suffered long and met many difficulties; but the frontier was in the end passed, and when he became Peter Rimboff, he was freed from the dread of being suspected to be Demetrius Krainsky; but he was not freed from the knowledge that he had left a pandemonium behind him. His life he desired to devote to mitigate these miseries. In this hope he joined the movement in progress, and became a Nihilist, yet at the same time accepted a local appointment under Government. He acted a double part to the end, that he might further his cause.

Many months passed occupied with this dual business, then Demetrius sought his wife in England, and now, with her leaning on his shoulder, he thought more of the distant sufferers than of her. It would be selfish to study his peace before the greater works he lived to achieve had met success.

He mused over the happiness and peace that would spring from the actions of his new political scheme, and the new field of labour he had entered into. He saw a crisis was imminent; he had been summoned to Moscow, and he

dreamed that he, with a few select and important men of his party, would be strong enough to force a despotic government to abandon obsolete principles, and to adopt a civilised form in administering justice instead of frustrating it. He dreamed and dreamed until his head rested on his wife's heavily, and the silence was broken by the deep breathing of sleep.

In this sleep Madame Verge foresaw the possibility that revenge, coupled with patriotism, had lost the vein of enthusiasm in her husband's mind. How could she strew more birdlime to stay his flight from peace and home, and frustrate his design to wage a war of fiery words wielded by a mighty pen! Alas! such pens have made many wars to rage.

Demetrius slept long. No sleep had closed his eyes for some forty hours; he had worked for the good of his cause, and with his war-pen had set down dangerous words in cipher, to be scanned and talked over by his party at Moscow.

The sloping ray of light had died away, the heavy, grey clouds seemed to touch the hill-tops, the sun sank, hiding the last speck of his grand red disc in the west, the dusky shades of evening twilight and the chilly breezes blew over the dark-tinted waters of the lake, and came in mild gusts to land, reminding Madame Verge that her absence might cause anxiety at Winander

Cottage. Still Demetrius was in deep sleep; and as

> 'Unnatural deeds
> Do breed unnatural troubles, infected minds
> To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.'

To his living pillow he muttered disjointed sentences.

'Caution, silence, . . . gold, gold, bait the hook with gold, . . . that never fails . . . caution, caution . . . hide the hook, but make it strong, Ossinman—caution.'

Madame Verge moved not a muscle except those that might give greater power to hearing.

Demetrius made a sudden start. 'I may be too late!' he said, in alarm. He looked around him, unconscious where he was, bewildered.

'Too late for what, Demetrius? Not too late to return to your new home.'

Had she prevailed?

Madame Verge's voice brought her husband's thoughts from Moscow to Windermere; but home was a word that startled him into his true position.

'Home! my Vera? I dreamed I was going home to my afflicted compatriots, and too late to pass the frontier. Did I dream aloud?'

'Oh, yes, of baiting hooks with gold, and such like follies; but you will never leave me again to find frontiers closed to you, and to follow a troubled life that in the end may prove

as fruitless as your dreams, and crowded with follies too.'

'I play one more stake, and once more leave you, dear wife—but not to play the fool. Heaven forbid! My hope is in discussing and disseminating just and right principles to paralyse a despot's will: to root out corruption, and plant in justice and liberty is the end I seek. In my sleep did I mention names?'

'Yes, one Ossinman.'

Madame Verge was sad. She had lost her hope.

'Treason to my cause! Dreams invent words as well as scenes. Ossinman must be a myth.'

Demetrius looked round him furtively—old habits clung to him. The dark shades of night foretold the hour of parting; and, to lessen the pain to his wife, he spoke on a subject that would engross her mind with affectionate interest—their daughter.

They walked through the wood in pathways of their own contrivance, and Demetrius gave a word of warning to his wife in this wise,—

'You have a duty at this time to complete. Hasten the recognition of Vera's marriage by Athelstan's family. I have played the spy on him, even in his father's house.'

At this moment the moon broke out brightly from behind the clouds and threw a ray of

strong light on two figures sauntering towards the path taken by Demetrius and his wife.

'Our children, Vera.'

And the thought struck Demetrius—'A help to leave-taking; for Demetrius's widow, like Cæsar's wife, must be above suspicion. An instant more it would be aroused.'

Still in the shade from moonlight, one hasty kiss he pressed on his wife's lips, and was quickly lost to her sight, hidden by the shadows of the thick trees. Madame Verge was rooted to the spot; and had she read Demetrius's heart aright, thus could she have defined it—

> 'What! gone without a word?
> Ay, so true love should be: it cannot speak.'

Demetrius knew his game was desperate, and possibly he and his wife had met and parted for the last time.

A few minutes brought Athelstan and Vera to Madame Verge.

'Lost your way in the dark, mother, dear?'

'I think so—I think so.'

Madame Verge felt in a dream.

Vera put other questions. Madame Verge left them unanswered; all she said repeatedly was,—'I am tired, my children—too tired to talk;' and she walked with Vera and Athelstan to the cottage.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PEACEMAKER.

'A more glorious victory cannot be gained over another man than this: that when the injury began on his part, the kindness should begin on ours.'

TILLOTSON.

MUCH to the satisfaction of Mr Morgane, and to the great discomfort of Mrs Morgane, six months ago Lady Clara entered her new home, 'The Laurium,' the bride of Gordon Scott. We now find her in the trim gardens of 'The Laurium' in company with Father Cleon; he added but one more incongruity in 'The Laurium' household.

John Webster wrote more than two hundred years ago:—'Man is born happiest when his actions are arguments and examples of his virtue.' Father Cleon was true to this happy type. His placid, open countenance seemed to speak plainly that the burden of his sins was

light, and those committed in error were forgiven and forgotten. It was against his nature to act a disagreeable part; he had earned a good name, and deserved a reputation that was his ensign that proclaimed him worthy of trust. 'There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple.'

Father Cleon's mania for proselytising from other faiths to his own was the strong pivot on which his conscience worked; he had subjugated his will into obedience, so that it became a power that influenced, and guided by example, the principles and actions of others, he felt within him—

> 'A peace above all earthly dignities,
> A still and quiet conscience.'

Among his friends he numbered many who were as staunch supporters of the Church of England as he of the Church of Rome, and he never abused friendship; he was above a mean action; no one could lay to his charge that he had been guilty of fostering deceit in any member of a household, nor could he practise deception himself.

Such was the man whom Lady Clara Scott chose as her friend. Lady Clara, since her marriage, had often visited Winander Cottage. Athelstan had frequently visited 'The Laurium,' but Vera refused to accompany him; 'her pets would miss her, her marmosets would take cold

if neglected;' but the secret was that her dresses were out of date, and she knew the truth of Goldsmith's words, that an emperor in his nightcap would not meet with so much respect as an emperor with his crown; and Cinderella costumes might damage her prestige likewise.

Lady Clara laid her plan of reconciliation plainly before Vera, and with the desired object of winning a father to do his duty to his son, Vera consented to go for three days to 'The Laurium,' well knowing that though she did not require the furbelows and flouncings, poufs and quillings, that made up the expensive stylish toilette so much admired on Lady Clara, yet the neat classic style of costume that suited her, would need as much money to purchase as would suffice to provide all wants in the cottage for a week or two, and she was already in debt.

Lady Clara walked long in close conversation with Father Cleon, and led him into a secluded spot, to talk freely on the subject that at the moment was nearest her heart. She unmasked to him plans, giving him the why and the wherefore of her undertaking. She disclosed, too, that 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil,' for she bared the breast that inly writhed against the tortures of that green-eyed monster—jealousy.

Mr Morgane's anger had now cooled into

strong obstinacy, and Lady Clara saw a possibility that additional pressure might bring matters to an issue more favourable than the termination threatened. Father Cleon was the instrument she desired to use to this end.

Athelstan had confided to Lady Clara his intention to seek his fortune out of England—in a word, to emigrate; for he saw the wants of his family increasing, and his scanty means did not expand with them, but his debts did.

Then came jealousy to gnaw Lady Clara's peace. What would her sacrificed life be worth, if Athelstan were not near, to feel her love work blessings for him, and to fall spellbound into her snare?

What if she ceased to influence him, and left him to the care of the good, patient, loving Vera, who was satisfied with love in a cottage, if only her husband worshipped her as an ideal being, and let her play with life, and please him with her wit, and readings from Shakespeare, that fascinated him into the expression, 'that her perfect intonation gave beauty to thoughts and words that he dreamed not existed, though our greatest poet conceived them?'

If Athelstan and Vera emigrated, Lady Clara foresaw they would live within the narrow limits of love, contentment, and enough; or the gift of making enough out of small gains. As she

read their characters, there was not the 'shadow's shadow;' ambition in either soul; no high venture that would ever place Athelstan on the pedestal of fortune that his father endeavoured to crush under him. Their love and loneliness, their mutual whisper, our 'solitude is sweet,' would suffice to make life languish into inertia, and pass away achieving nothing.

Lady Clara felt she must make an effort to prevent such a step in a downward direction. She desired, too, to keep Athelstan under her vigilant eye, to make the web of his life become interwoven with hers for their mutual benefit. How little she knew of the vein of sterling worth that ran through Vera's character. How little did Vera know it existed in herself. She knew her weaknesses, but it was reserved for adversity to prove all that was in her strength, rusting for want of use.

Lady Clara schooled Father Cleon into clearly seeing the first move to be effected was to take off the ban on Athelstan's marriage. In this confidential converse Gordon encountered his wife.

Equipped in sawney hat and long coat, Gordon had wandered, too, into secluded parts, coming suddenly in sight of Lady Clara, he mused thus:—'So my lady has changed her pastime and her gallant from Athelstan to a priest. Ah! old Father Cleon, too honest to

give himself saintly airs, and too saintly to be otherwise than honest.'

'May I make the fatal number to happiness and destroy a pleasant *tête-à-tête?*' said Gordon, as he took Father Cleon's hand.

'It is well we met,' said Lady Clara. 'Father Cleon must have become weary of my chatter, which has been so fluent that it has imposed some silence on him.'

'Madam, that is the penalty you impose on most people who are amiable; even now you answer for Father Cleon.'

'I am in fault, Gordon. Pardon, Father Cleon,' Lady Clara said, with a tinge of play in her voice, as she looked towards her friend.

'Through silence I gain much knowledge; and now I have much matter for contemplation. As to wearisomeness, I have not felt a jot, nor shall I feel it when I play my part, guided, I hope, by common sense and past experience,' was Father Cleon's reply.

'Weighty words!' said Gordon. 'What momentous matter has my frivolous wife in hand now? Sure, something in opposition to present currents; even against you or me she would build a Quaker's meeting-house, and wear an ugly bonnet, if it suited her whim, and as easily as she counts her beads after her confirmation, and tacitly signing the articles as an Anglican.'

'Sarcasm is impiety when religion is attacked, and a man of your cloth, Gordon, should refrain from it, even as a side blow to a frivolous wife. But let that pass. I have a word to say, for I think I have not told you Athelstan and his wife will come to-day for a visit of three days.'

'Sweet dissembler, you know you have not.'

'Aunt and Uncle Morgane will soon be here, and their visit will be according to their pleasure,'

'To-day! uninvited?'

'No; invited by me.'

'A late confession, surely. Now, good father, do you allow my wife to commit such omissions in confession of her minor sins?'

'I trust all to her conscience.'

'And finding that guilty, reprove her gently, as I must.'

'Gordon!'

'Ludere—pardon—but no jesting on sacred subjects in my present company; yet it takes a cooler man than your humble servant to face a conspiracy on the eve of hatching in his own house; particularly when he sees reason to believe his peace of mind and body will suffer. Is it not Petrarch who gives peace five enemies?—Ambition, Avarice, Pride, Envy, and Anger: true, *I* give but one. Family!—my peace, is attacked by no other enemy; without *family*, it is perfect. Happy Petrarch, he must have

lived remote from his family, or that enemy to peace would have been foremost on the list. A wife brings a double family around one. The Villeroys would make my house their shooting-box, if I allowed the liberty. When I was a bachelor they sniffed their noses in the air as I passed, now they carry a broad grin and show their teeth; but the hypocrites till doomsday may play that game before I recognise one as my relation.'

'You are unjust, Gordon; I never press the Villeroys or the Percivals on you.'

'Oh no, they press themselves, being your people.' In a tone of raillery, Gordon continued,—'In my old bachelor days, too, Athelstan Morgane rarely touched me with the tips of his fingers; now, he passes as many days here as he does in Windermere.'

Lady Clara looked indignant, and was silent. The look was not lost upon Gordon, he saw how the blow struck, and continued,—

'Athelstan I welcome at all times. Under a cloud, poor boy; all his father's fault in not acknowledging with him and Shakespeare, "God, the best maker of all marriages."'

'Let us talk no more on family matters,' said Lady Clara, sharply.

'Just a few words, as you are short-sighted enough to bring the Verges and Morganes together. Now, that is a little family jarring knot I

do not intend to face; in fact, I cannot; I have a letter from the bishop—and I think to-day—'

Gordon stopped short, as he fumbled in his breast-coat pocket and drew out a letter; a mitre and motto were plainly visible, but it was a well-thumbled epistle, and a shrewd mental guess of Lady Clara's decided it had done duty similar to the present on other occasions —Gordon referred to it.

'Yes, to-day I must go to see him, and my return home will be uncertain.'

'A late confession also,' said Lady Clara, in a tone of voice that carried with it an accent of unbelief; she said no more, being too well bred to be discourteous; but her husband understood her to the letter.

'Ah! my sweet wife, when you have burned your fingers most thoroughly, you will regret having touched the fuel with a lighted torch.'

'Gordon, if you do not fan the flame, I fancy no fire will come.'

There was a biting sarcasm in Lady Clara's retort, that could not fail to touch Gordon.

The Reverend Gordon Scott, beau ideal of a clerical dandy, trimmed to a nicety that could not pass unnoticed, with an aristocratic mien in feature, figure, and gait, formed a noble specimen of that fine animal, man, and he was fully conscious of that fact. Grand though he be externally, internally he broods mean thoughts.

When he reached his house, his fine features were clouded with frowns, his eyes glistened in anger, and in the heat of his vehemence against his wife, such words as, 'blind,' 'simple idiot,' escaped his lips.

Athelstan and his father reconciled at this moment, would frustrate much that had caused him to marry his cousin. Let Mr Morgane's fair promises become facts, then may father and son shake hands, or the deluge—if only a Mount Arrarat be left on which Gordon's own ark could rest. His egoism prevented him giving Athelstan's position a second thought; his father might be right or wrong, just or unjust, it was not a matter he was called upon to settle; but his egoism was not strong enough to incite him to plan, or scheme, or promote, or frustrate events. All good that came to him must require no snare, for he never would lay one.

Gordon foresaw turmoil on the first meeting of the Morganes and Verges, perhaps a hubbub of voices, all talkers and no listeners, and it would be well for him to be out of the skirmish, whether the feud became more desperate, or ended for ever in a *feu de joie* and peace.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS CADE'S DILEMMA.

Hamlet. I would you were so honest a man.
Polonius. Honest, my lord?
Ham. Ay, sir: to be honest as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.
Pol. That's very true, my lord.—SHAKESPEARE.

GORDON SCOTT was off the course long before the coming contest between the families Morgane and Verge commenced, and on the road to his bishop; but the cause is soon told why he turned to the left, and got among the goats, instead of pursuing the journey that would have taken him to the shepherd of his own flock.

He had gone a mile from his home, and was riding leisurely, when he overtook Mrs Cade driving two spirited little ponies. These little beasts would not slacken their pace at her command; they were fresh, and enjoyed their play-work; obedient she could not make them

until she brought them to a stand-still, and then allowed them to shake their heads and paw the ground restlessly to their hearts' content.

'Going as far as Ambit Station, Chris?' said Gordon, with a familiar air.

'Yes, Mr Scott, I may pass it,' replied Mrs Cade, with marked emphasis on the name.

'Then, Mrs Cade, let me drive with you, and your man can take my horse to "The Laurium." There is something amiss with the curb; he is fidgeting himself and me to death. We shall never reach Ambit together.'

The man failed to find fault in the curb, and rode the horse to 'The Laurium' with a light hand, as instructed by Gordon, and found him as steady and comfortable in behaviour as the best-trained horse in a county should be, and as Gordon had the pride to consider him after many competitions and prizes gained; but all circumstances can be forced to suit the hour without a witness.

Not so quickly told will be Gordon's little sayings and doings when in the company of Mrs Cade.

'Chris, you do not come to "The Laurium" as often as you should. Let me drive the ponies until a little of their play is out of them. That is right. It is easier work for you to sit and talk to me. Tell me why you make your visits so seldom, Chris.'

'Please, Mr Scott, do not call me Chris, now.'

'Why? You used to call me Gordon. Call me Gordon, and we shall be on even ground. I am an old married man, and you—well—not old, but married, and, of course, very staid.'

'My husband does not like you to call me Chris, and I am to call you Mr Scott always.'

'You obey your husband! Well, Chris, my wife does not obey me; in fact, I think wives are a great mistake.'

'Then I wonder you left your horse to drive with one.'

'Ah! but there is some romance and excitement in gossiping with another man's wife, especially when the first dew was kissed off her lips by—'

'Mr Scott, do not talk like an overgrown boy.'

'No, Chris; but simply understand another man's wife is more newsy—allow the word—than one's own, and, therefore, for the hour, more attractive—that is all. Now, tell me why you have left off calling at "The Laurium." You little know how I miss you. Have you been told not to go?'

'Yes.'

'Who told you? My wife?'

'Oh! dear no. My husband.'

'How obedient you are to his whims.'

'Of course. I like to please him, and he has a hasty temper.'

'Jealous, I suppose.'

'Oh! dear no. He has no need to be.'

'But you have a spirit of your own, Chris. I know too well—we had a quarrel once; but I could never see the cause that in pique you should marry Joseph Cade, and make a martyr of me. Now, why did you? Be honest.'

Mrs Cade had more than once asked herself the same question, and she said demurely,—

'Everybody told me you would never marry.'

'The prophets told you wrong, and that is the reason I have a disobedient, instead of an obedient, wife. You have no look in you of a girl who would wish to rule a husband, and fill his house with people without asking him if he wished them invited.'

'I would not dare do such a thing; but no wife would.'

'Some would, dear little Chris; but when wives do such things, husbands go to Ambit Station. By the way, you really have some object in going to Ambit?'

'None in the world, except to accommodate you. I fancied you wanted me to call for a parcel, or do some such errand for you.'

'Dear little amiable Chris.' Gordon made a long pause before he continued,—'Chris, I have always thought pretty, little, fairy girls, light and merry, just as you were, make better and more lovable wives than dignified, com-

manding beauties, whose majestic manners never leave them, who lack ease, and put their companions under restraint.'

'Some handsome women are very lovable, Mr Scott.'

'Chris, I have been leaning on your cushion all this time; let me place it for you to lean on.'

All unpremeditated, Gordon felt his old love revive; he could not avoid showing it in little acts of fondness towards the object that called it forth.

'Thank you, Mr Scott.'

'What an unfortunate quarrel we had.'

'Try to forget all about it; it was very foolish, but it is more foolish to talk about it now.'

'I was thinking, Chris, how happy we might have been at "The Laurium." That tiff, and your hasty marriage, made me marry without love,—the natural consequence is, I must love where I cannot marry. I want you to take pity on me, and—'

'Mr Scott, you must not talk so; it is not fair to Joe, and Joe is a very good man.'

'Well, but Joe will take pity on me too, you silly little girl; all shall be fair and above board. I am sometimes dull at home, Chris, and a merry laugh with you and Joe would be as beneficial to my spirits as a cruise round the world. I am sorely hard pressed, you see.'

'Your mind, I am sure, is not in a healthy state, and a cruise round the world would do you good, Mr Scott. I have noticed when people are restless and fanciful, and weary of home, let them travel, and invariably they return and sing merrily, "There is no place like home."'

'Well, Chris, I thought I should have drawn from you an invitation to go to the Priory, and chat with Joe, whenever I felt my home dull; but you send me to Coventry. Now, Chris, by way of breaking the thin ice that has glazed over our friendship, I will dine with you and Joseph to-day.'

'Mr Cade will not be at home until to-morrow. He has invented a thrashing machine, and has gone to the foundries at Fremorton.'

'Then I will dine with you, Chris; I daresay you have no friend with you.'

'No, I have not; and I am sure Joe would not like me to ask you. I would not offend Mr Cade, now he is in good temper; and he has not been hasty once since I gave up going to "The Laurium" to see Lady Clara; so it would be better, Mr Scott, if you postponed breaking the thin ice until Mr Cade returns home; then, perhaps, he will ask you to dinner.'

'Of course he will. Meanwhile, you shall

not offend Mr Cade by asking me, but I will dine with you unasked, and to-day: settled. Chris, I will go off the road to Ambit, and on the road to dinner, by way of Higston; we shall both earn an appetite in our long drive.'

Mrs Cade did not see her way out of this dilemma. Much as she wished Gordon at the bottom of the sea rather than offend Joe, she could not muster enough courage to drive her half-broken, fidgety ponies alone. Joe had told her they were just above her management; and he forbade her to test her skill in driving them unless accompanied by the groom, who understood them, and who was training them to their work. Now, if they bolted, or bruised their noses or knees by her mismanagement, that might be as great a sin on her part as to allow Mr Scott to dine with her after driving her home. He was so positive, and she so powerless, in the matter, that she made him no answer.

'A pretty drive through Higston, Chris—do you not think so?' said Gordon, enjoying his fun at the expense of Chris's discomfort.

'Oh, yes; very pretty.'

Gordon slackened his pace, as a steep hill lay before him.

'This drive reminds me of bygone pleasures,' he said dreamily; then, in a different tone of voice, said, 'I could have loved you—oh, so well!'

'Mr Scott, I will not let you talk so, it is so foolish.'

'No, Chris; you are foolish to apply so quickly my words to yourself. When I was training, I wished to be clever as an extemporiser; so I exercised my memory by committing much to its keeping, and often retrospectively glanced upon it, to see how fresh my store might be. I was going to pick out a mouldy fragment just to test myself. Well, Chris, you put me out; try again, Gordon.' And Gordon looked fondly on Joe's fairy little wife as he said again,—'"I could have loved you—oh, so well; the dream—" I forget what follows next; it is under a patch of brain-mould. Enough. I remember this,—

> "But when this early flush declines,
> When the heart's vivid morning fleets,
> You know not then how close it twines
> Around the first kindred soul it meets!
> Yes, yes, I could have loved—"

Apply that, Chris, if you will; for in you my heart finds its kindred soul.'

Mrs Cade could have cried with vexation, but she knew Gordon's eyes were upon her. She felt he was very wicked to play so serious a game. She was annoyed with herself that she could not express her indignation, or laugh off her annoyance. In a broken voice she managed to say,—

'Mr Scott, you should, in truth, know our positions better. This is not fair to Joe.'

'So you told me before. But, Chris, there is such a thing in life as friendship; that is fair to Joe.'

'But love does not end in friendship, Mr Scott; no, never!'

'No, Chris; always in hatred, according to the accepted rule, and I quite agree. But as we do not hate each other, Chris, one whit, I infer from proof what I must not say; for that would not be fair to Joe. So we will form an exception to the rule, and base our position on friendship, and from to-day, within those bonds, unite "The Laurium" with the Priory.'

Gordon drove the spirited little ponies through the town of Higston, and at the same time tried to lead the affections of Joe's wife into a wild maze, and he admired her because she gave him no word of wrath, but just tolerated his unmanly behaviour. The raw little animals prevented her taking the reins and ordering her persecutor out of her carriage with a scorn and contempt of him well merited, and never again would she have spoken to him; but now compulsion made her tolerate him. She held fast to the hope that all might end well, and Joe never hear of this drive or visit, if the ponies reached their stable unharmed.

By the time the Priory was approached, Mrs

Cade became less bewildered by Gordon's talk. So much are we the creatures of circumstances —so foes become friends.

When, at the Priory, Mrs Cade looked out on the lawn, she saw Gordon at play with her dogs. She thought he looked very good in his clerical dress, and very merry and handsome—a contrast to Joe, who often came home tired, and was never a dapper man.

Of course Mr Scott's flattery, pretended disappointment, and never-ending love were the off-shoots of humour. Mrs Cade knew he was always fond of talking wildly, promising much and meaning nothing. How foolish she had been to think he had spoken a serious word; his tongue never would have betrayed the truth if he cared a jot for her. How he must have laughed at her! and how she now laughed at herself! Notwithstanding Mrs Cade settled these questions agreeably to her mind, when she went on the lawn to join Gordon, she resolved to be distant and cool in manner.

Gordon saw the little fairy wife was playing a deliberate game. She looked insincere in her hauteur—as insincere as she supposed he had been in his ill-timed talk; still, it were better she should treat him in a stand-off fashion—better to see she resented his behaviour, even if it were influenced by fun alone—it would prevent a recurrence of the annoyance.

This hauteur was of short existence. Gordon soon brushed away the thin varnish of sedateness, and Mrs Cade lost the fear of Joseph's anger, and felt secure in her own conscience, and made the shrewd guess that under a sawney hat no malice could exist to inveigle her into ever so harmless a flirtation, that, in a mild way, could trouble her domestic peace. It was altogether too foolish—too frivolous.

Gordon set up the croquet hoops, and he and Chris played a lively game, in which the dogs occasionally interfered, and pushed the balls about with their noses and paws, to the discomfort of the players, and sometimes came in contact with a swift ball, to the discomfort of themselves.

Dinner was announced before the game was finished. The sound of the gong was of little moment; the old married clergyman and the little merry wife were too interested in themselves to have been much interested in the game. They had a little quarrel over who had the best of it, and who would have won had it been played out, but it ended amicably; and after a discreet hint given, that before the servants Chris must be addressed as Mrs Cade, the croquet-players left the lawn and entered the house.

Conversation at dinner fitted the rule that society sanctions, viz., neighbours' affairs openly

discussed, and all was as formal as Mrs Cade desired.

Mrs Cade and Gordon Scott sipped tea together in the drawing-room, and restraint wore off again.

The evening wore on, and Mrs Cade suggested that the road to 'The Laurium' was lonely, and it was likely to be a dark night, and inferred Gordon should leave. Instead of Gordon taking this hint, he related a ghost story he had heard from one of his benighted parishioners; as her suggestion recalled to him the timidity of her disposition, he further improved the occasion, and turned the subject of his talk on thieves and housebreakers. A large gang was about, faces covered with crape, and feet shod with wadding—most lawless monsters; depredations too fearful to relate had been perpetrated; the ringleaders and the whole crew were at large. So it was reported. At first Mrs Cade turned pale, then livid, then trembled from head to foot.

'Dear me, Chris! have I frightened you?'

'Oh, Gordon!' she answered in her fright; 'you know my horror of burglars. In this lonely place, my fear of them haunts me from dusk to daybreak. Now, Joe away, and one of the men-servants, too, who took the plans for him! If the thieves should hear that we have two men less in the house! How dread-

ful it is! Pray, go at once, and I will sit up all night and watch.'

'Oh, Chris, I thought you had heard of the gang being about. I am sorry I mentioned the subject.' Gordon assumed a tone of innocence.

'Joe would not tell me. The cracks and creaks, rats and mice all combined, make this house detestable at night. I am sure the ghosts of the old monks prowl about too. But go, Mr Scott, pray go, or I shall be nervous about you.'

'But, Chris, are you sure you feel quite safe yourself? Mr Cade away.'

'Safe? no! But what can I do? What can you propose? I wonder—but of course you could not—'

'Let me hear your wonder, Chris, then I can tell you if I could not.'

'Could you stop here to-night? Would Lady Clara be anxious if you do not return home?'

'Does Mr Cade wear a nightcap?'

'What an extraordinary question! He does.'

'With a little tassel at the top?'

'Yes; a thorough Pickwickian.'

'That little tassel is important.'

'Nonsense.'

'It is. It prevents baldness; you see you

take hold of the tassel when you remove the cap, instead of dragging hair out of your head.'

'How clever you are. I never thought of that. Say if you will stop to-night.'

'Yes, Chris, I will, if you will lend me one of Mr Cade's nightcaps.'

'How kind of you! I shall feel so safe, and you shall have a nightcap. They are awfully out of fashion, you know.'

'I approve of keeping the head warm and brain cool. You look braver now, Chris.'

'Do I, but Gor— Mr Scott, I was frightened, and you are awfully kind to stop here to protect me.'

'Repay the kindness by giving me a cigar, Chris. I suppose you let Joe smoke in any room he likes.'

'I would let him, but he allows no smoking in his house except in his smoking-room.'

'Oh, misery! I will not have my evening smoke.'

'I will sit with you. I always sit with Joe when he has no friend with him, and I am a little nervous.'

'What a dear little angel you are, Chris. What a halo shines about you, and everything you touch, only because you are natural in your ways, putting on no Parisian varnish.'

'Enough, Mr Scott;' and Mrs Cade assumed a little dignity as she opened the door quickly,

and said,—'I will lead you to the smoking-room and show you Joe's best cigars.'

Gordon followed her, thinking the while, how happy the man must be who possessed a wife who could be trapped by the tales of ghosts and thieves, and brought to death's paleness, then influenced to regain rosy animation by foolish chat about a nightcap and cigar.

Then flashed across his mind a fragment from his memory's store, as a voice of conscience and warning,—'How inexpressible is the meanness of being a hypocrite! how horrible is it to be a mischievous and malignant hypocrite!' He winced at the precept of his monitor. A momentary pang; for from his hoarded treasures of truths, another rose to his mind in its Latin form and checked it,—'We have all a propensity to grasp at forbidden fruit,' and he was quite at his ease when he reached the smoking-room, and Mrs Cade pointed out Joe's most comfortable chair, his choicest cigars, and his favourite pipe, 'that he could detect if any other person had smoked, though the fumes were from his own tobacco.'

'I will test that truth, Chris; let me smoke it; and mind, dear child, to keep my visit secret: see if he will discover the flavour of my lips upon it.'

'I scarcely dare to keep your visit secret, nor let you smoke Joe's pipe.'

'It is done, and the secret must be kept,'

said Gordon, filling the pipe with tobacco from an ornamented jar that was near.

No, Mrs Cade was not angry, she said meekly, —'You must clean it carefully when you finish smoking, Mr Scott, or Joe will be so cross. He knows I never smoke, so what can I say?'

'All shall be right, Chris; give yourself no trouble in the matter. I have snared other men's game before to-day, Chris.'

'It is not fair; Joe is choice in the matter of that pipe.'

'Remember, Chris, what the eye does not see, grieves not the heart.'

So Gordon settled that matter, and settled himself comfortably in Joe's vacant chair.

'But I see it, and don't half like it.'

Mrs Cade forgot all about burglars, crape faced and velvet footed, and opened the window and let in the fresh, sweet-scented evening breeze. It was not the dark night that she had prognosticated; the strong moonlight was pouring a white lustre over the lawn, making the night as light as day. Mrs Cade stood by the window, and the moonbeams touched her with a vivid colouring, and on the features of the little fairy wife was a look of sadness and vexation; but she was very pretty under it; no pouting lip; she had the look of a child in inward distress that it tried to conceal.

Gordon said he was in a poetical mood, in-

duced by his surroundings, and in his rich melodious voice, with studied telling emphasis repeated, as though to himself, these lines:—

'Language affords not my distress a name,
  Yet it is real, and no sickly dream;
'Tis love inflicts it; though to feel that flame,
  Is all I know of happiness supreme.

When love departs, a chaos wide and vast,
  And dark as hell, is open'd in the soul;
When love returns, the gloomy scene is past,
  No tempests shake her, and no fears control.

Then tell me why these ages of delay?
  O Love, all excellent, once more appear;
Disperse the shades, and snatch me into day,
  From this abyss of night, these floods of fear!

No, Love is angry, will not now endure
  A sigh of mine, or suffer a complaint;
He smites me, wounds me, and withholds the cure,
  Exhausts my powers, and leaves me sick and faint.

Love, holy Love! and art you not severe,
  To slight me, thus devoted, and thus fix'd!
But I am silent, seeing what I see—
  And fear, with cause, that I am self-deceiv'd.
Was ever heart that lov'd thee treated so?
  Yet I adore thee, though it seem in vain.'

Gordon ended his verses, but the mysterious glamour that surrounded him remained, and the effect of his voice was like the tones of a song, reviving painful remembrances that touched Mrs Cade acutely.

As Gordon resumed smoking, Mrs Cade

became sadder and sadder. She knew she was very foolish; still, a tear came in her eye, and worse, a tender feeling in her heart. She walked out on the lawn that touched the window step, and sauntered on in the moonlight; and the tears would come fast and faster, and she wished to get away from herself and away from Gordon; both were equally impossible. All other windows and doors were closed for the night, except the window in the smoking-room, and with eyes brimming over with tears, she could not ring to summon a servant to open a door for her; so she glided on and on, glimmering in the moonlight, then, resting with her elbow on the low pedestal of a sun-dial, and her forehead on her hand, she supported herself whilst she tried to compose and subdue her foolish fears. She stood as a statue of chiselled marble, the light marking the folds of her white dress in various degrees of shade and brightness, and played on her pretty childlike face, marking distinctly each line of melancholy.

Mrs Cade did not like her forebodings. If Gordon really still loved her, how unfortunate for her peace and his that they had met after their marriages! This was the last time she would see him, and she would tell him so on the morrow. Why should they both be made unhappy, and Joe ill-tempered? No, she would never see him again. This determina-

tion arrived at, her tears were beginning to be less abundantly shed, when she gave a sudden start, for she felt a slight touch.

Gordon had seen the effect of the poet's words on Mrs Cade, though she had left him when the first symptoms of weak tears came upon her. Yes, he felt some pride that his 'old love' still loved him; he watched her as she walked out, and admired, with a keen sense of romance, the pretty pose of Chris in tears, as she was resting on the sun-dial. When he thought she had been miserable long enough to suit his purpose, he strolled noiselessly on the lawn and touched her, as she did not seem to know he was near her.

'I am not a burglar, Chris.' Gordon might have added, 'I am far more evil.'

'I did not hear your footsteps.' In her surprise, Mrs Cade did not disguise her tears.

'What! crying, Chris, dear child. I have come to tell you I will not smoke Joe's pipe, if you take it so much to heart.'

There was a blank look for a few moments on Mrs Cade's face. Yes, she was weak to think he meant a word of that bewitchful rhyme! But she could not laugh at herself yet, for she had felt so sorry for him and herself too, and her feelings had been so ruthlessly touched, and all the while he had been thinking his offence that grieved her was in his disobedi-

ence to her request not to smoke Joe's pipe; and she had felt the soul of a poet was in him, and had compared his soft-toned words to Joe's homely untuned voice, that had not even the ring of honesty left in it to win one jot of value in the comparison.

At length she realised her position, and felt so satisfied that Gordon had mistaken her cause of weakness.

'Come, Chris, we will make up this little quarrel on the spot, and let us square matters; you clean Joe's pipe while I smoke one of his cigars. That will be fair to Joe.' So saying, Gordon took her hand and put her arm over his, and led her back to the smoking-room.

Little sobs came now and again as the process of pipe-cleaning went on, as Chris keenly felt her folly.

'No one is always wise; even Socrates is supposed to have danced, though many people would not believe it.'

'Why would they not, Mr Scott?' Mrs Cade asked with indifference; her thoughts were busy devising means to leave Gordon.

'Why? Chris, my child!' Gordon's assumed surprise brought Mrs Cade to give attention.

'It is wiser to dance, surely, than look out of place and stand like a log in the way,' she said quickly.

'One cannot always be wise, I repeat, and a

philosopher dancing seems almost as ridiculous as a person talking nonsense, and a little woman taking his nonsense to heart.'

'Quite, Mr Scott. Time is getting on, I will—'

'Not leave me, Chris! Stop whilst I smoke another cigar! "Time, as he passes us, has a dove's wing, unsoiled and swift, and a silken sound;" we will not heed him, he is so pleasant.'

There seemed a fascination in Gordon's voice, and Chris demurely drew her chair to the open window, sat quietly whilst Gordon smoked his cigar, and did worse.

He, who could not have his peace broken by a family jar, was breaking another's peace, whispering and quoting soft words—in short, ignoring the golden rule. Each word was distilling a poison to the ear, a misery to the heart. There was a fascination in the coiled serpent that could not be shaken off.

The stable clock chimed the hour. Mrs Cade rang the bell as she said,—

'Mr Scott, please leave to-morrow before eleven o'clock. Joe will return home to-morrow morning. I shall not see you again. I will wish you good-bye now. Pray do not leave later than eleven.'

'Is that quite fair to Joe? eat his dinner, smoke his tobacco, and leave his house without a word of civility?'

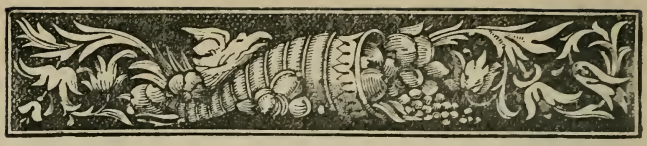
'Promise me, please, to go.'

'I sometimes oversleep myself,' said Gordon teasingly.

The servant entered the room. Mrs Cade gave her usual caution: 'Brown, bar all the shutters safely,' and left the room, with a mind disturbed and thoughtful. Gordon went to the room set apart for him, well-satisfied with his day's amusement. He failed to see in his artful 'nonsense' he was guilty of—

> 'Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue Hypocrite; takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
> And sets a blister there; makes marriage vows
> As false as dicer's oaths. Oh, such a deed,
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul; and sweet Religion, makes
> A rhapsody of words.'

Gordon decided mentally that Chris would be a coquette, and it was pleasant to play with her. He contrasted their merry game of croquet and his dipping into his vast store of scraps that still clung to his memory, and the amusement he gave himself in watching the effect on his sole listener, little Chris, with the contest that was likely to have been fought out at 'The Laurium,' and he congratulated himself he was in happier quarters, and he slept soundly, at peace with all men and with himself.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ROUND TABLE.

'It is sweet to feel by what fine spun threads our affections are drawn together.'—STERNE.

LADY CLARA'S scheme began to work. Three of her guests arrived at the appointed time, but it was not until dinner had reached the third course that Mr and Mrs Morgane appeared on the *scene*, that, by Father Cleon's intervention, was intended to be played out for Athelstan's benefit.

This late arrival helped Lady Clara to overcome a difficulty that had perplexed her. Vera had stipulated that she should be introduced as 'Mrs Athelstan Morgane.' This was tantamount to saying she would not be introduced to Athelstan's parents; thus Lady Clara treated it, and Vera remained unknown, to suit her proposed plan of action. Vera had long dreaded the time when her task would be to ingratiate

herself, and gain the favour of her husband's relatives. She might be nervous, and possibly hang her head as a guilty culprit.

Her fears were greater in anticipating her trial to act a scene in her own life's drama, than she had experienced when she knew a thousand eyes would be upon her to scrutinise her in a new character, wherein the chief attraction would be marred or made by the power or weakness that was manifested in sustaining her part. At the family meeting nothing would be required of her but affability in order to conciliate an adverse feeling that existed; yet her nervousness had been barely supportable.

The moment came. How great was her joy; she felt at her ease, courageous and hopeful, for 'a heart unspotted is not easily daunted,' and it seemed to her that her head rose an inch higher, and her eyes grew brighter, as she witnessed the affectionate greeting Mrs Morgane accorded Athelstan, as she said, 'This is a happy surprise—like good Clara's work.'

Athelstan's surprise was raised; he was doubtful as to the motive that actuated Lady Clara to shroud this meeting in mystery, and he felt it behoved him to be watchful, and leave the solution in the hands of his friends; and when he found Vera's presence was quite unheeded, he knew some plot had been devised of which he was ignorant.

Conversation was brisk; Father Cleon was an adept in aiding it. He always had a latent string in his discourse that he could rouse to a full tune at the inspiration of the moment. He never tired others by wasting words in long-drawn discussions, that left little profit or pleasure to follow, but in a pithy word, would send the fitful shuttle-cock of conversation flying with a charming vivacity, and without aim; strike the gay or grave, the satirist or wit, as chance might direct the spark of repartee to rise from either to return it, giving cause for a merry laugh or well-hit truth, a good-natured joke or pertinent rejoinder.

Lady Clara was hopeful of her scheme. Vera was affable, and Mr Morgane was pleased to converse with her, and not a ray of suspicion crossed his mind that she was the 'Windermere lass,' who was 'not green.' Nor could he have dreamed that Lady Clara had the courage to force a meeting between himself and his daughter-in-law upon him.

Lady Clara did not allow dinner to grow to a weary length. In a pause in conversation, she spoke of the properties of her table,—

'A round table is so cosy, dear uncle, and I intend mine to act as a magic friend-maker.'

'A good purpose. Let the magic produced continue when our circle expands wider than

the table—then we may still feel a bond of unity in our friendship.'

Mr Morgane addressed his last remark to Vera. Vera replied, with a strong force of sincerity,—

'That, indeed, is my life's desire.'

Vera's energy pleased Mr Morgane.

'I detect a genuine impulse of feeling in your short answer, called into play by this magic circle. Place enemies at a long table, but friends at a round.'

'Let enemies meet at the round table and part friends,' said Father Cleon.

'A sally worthy one of King Arthur's knights, and strong enough to mend a breach, if each knight will help to build up the buttress I am striving to erect,' replied Lady Clara.

'When occasion requires I will lend my hand, for I love a mission of peace. Now all enemies are without the camp,' said Mr Morgane.

Athelstan felt conscious that his father looked in a meaning glance on him, possibly suggested by his own sensitive conscience.

'A breach should not be neglected, or the gap left too long open; we must force a rally, Athelstan, and complete our work. You are a free-lance, but will be on my side, eh?' said Lady Clara.

The conversation had some point in it, and

Athelstan's position in suddenly meeting his father in the presence of his wife made him cautious.

'Rely on me,' was his only answer.

'I do, to support me at all hazards, when we begin our work.'

'Heaven forbid it is to seek a renegade husband, our missing Gordon,' said Mrs Morgane.

'To show we are in perfect accord, I drink to his health in his absence, and would from his own cup if it were here,' said Lady Clara, as she raised her glass to her lips, and laughed at her feeble joke.

Vera saw a stern, thoughtful look on Athelstan's face; she feared a false move, and said ambiguously,—

'"Take heed how you awake our sleeping sword of war," even at a cosy round table.'

Well quoted, said Mr Morgane, 'for a keen word meets all who meddle in matrimonial differences. Gordon is in good company.'

'He may be,' Lady Clara replied, doubtfully. She desired to turn the 'sleeping sword' upon herself, profiting by Vera's hint that it was premature to touch on the topic that caused this meeting.

'Must be! my dear Clara, when with a bishop. Let no word of calumny touch our bishops,' said Mrs Morgane, firmly.

'Nor my worthy husband. Yet, auntie, in this strange world it is difficult with certainty to look further than the length of one's nose, mystery begins at its very tip; for on good authority I have been told we are surrounded by spirits, and unless I could see to the end of the bee-line from my nose to the tip of the bishop's nose, I would not say my husband is now his visitor.' Lady Clara enforced her words with a smart playful tap of her fan on her hand.

'Faith and trust defend us from suspicion; yet a twinge of truth makes my nose feel the outward boundary of certainty that you laugh over. Many bee-lines end in mystery from it, one—' as Mr Morgane spoke he looked at Vera.

'Uncle Morgane, you entirely catch my meaning,' Lady Clara said quickly, fearing to disclose Vera's name at this moment; and Mr Morgane's action in looking towards her raised her suspicion that he desired to unravel that mystery, and she continued,—'The certainty, I see, is the vacant place caused by my husband's absence on this occasion, and this is the first time my round table has been used as a medium.'

Then Father Cleon said his word of help. 'And well used. "What seasoned first the vessel keeps the taste." May good fellowship ever surround it.'

'Thank you, good Father Cleon. Now weave my fantasy and dream, both light as air, into a substance tangible and visible, strong in concord, justice, and goodfellowship. All praise be to the round table that works the charm to success, the opportunity is with us.' Saying these obscure words, which were clear as daylight to Father Cleon, Lady Clara left him to act as peace-maker between Athelstan and his father, and intent on her design to carry forward her peace work at the same hour, entered the garden room with Madame Verge, Vera, and Mrs Morgane.

Now Lady Clara's tact came into force. Vera was quickly seated at the piano, and Madame Verge stood by her side to turn over the pages of the sonata which she played, and Lady Clara sat with Mrs Morgane at the window that looked out on the terrace and that part of the grounds appropriated to flower-beds.

'Who is that lovely girl? and how well she pleased your uncle.'

'Have you no idea?'

'To the same question Athelstan gave me as indefinite an answer, by saying after dinner I should know her name. She is very charming, but I cannot guess who she is.'

'I am so glad you like her, auntie, for she is Mrs Athelstan Morgane, and the lady with her Madame Verge.'

The sword was now drawn, and Lady Clara would use it to finish her contest quickly; she would venture deep thrusts for Athelstan's sake; for him she worked, that he should not leave her.

If Lady Clara had literally plunged a sharp sword into Mrs Morgane's heart, the pain she inflicted would not have been sharper. She tried to master her feelings, but her endeavours were ineffectual—her painful surprise could not be hidden. A tumult of many conflicting thoughts raged within her.

Lady Clara saw the outward sign of confusion, but knew nothing of the sore wound that she had probed, and the smart rankling it left, touched so abruptly and heavily.

Mrs Morgane's cause of silent sorrow had been the plague spot in her married life. Was it to rise up openly before her, and before the world? Confront and torture her? In her presence was her son's wife, and, she feared, the sharer of his future sorrows; and there was a painful mystery about her parentage, no search could be made to clear it, for—

'From the body of one guilty deed
A thousand ghostly fears and haunting thoughts proceed.'

'May I introduce Vera to you, auntie?' asked Lady Clara, when she had given Mrs Morgane time to collect her straying thoughts.

'What should I say?' Mrs Morgane seemed crushed by her fears.

'Let me bring her to you, a reconciliation may follow; Athelstan is with his father, and Father Cleon is his friend. Let all blame be on me.'

A weak hope came to Mrs Morgane, still it was hope strong enough for her to give her consent to speak to Vera as Athelstan's wife.

Lady Clara rang the bell; the summons brought Athelstan's son on the scene, radiant in smiles, white embroidery, and broad sash. Lady Clara took the child in her arms, and the sonata came to a conclusion at the same moment, then the deed was done for good or evil—Vera was introduced to her mother-in-law, and under the name of Morgane.

Mrs Morgane took a few minutes to realise her position, and make her proper posé in it to suit the view her husband might take of her actions; yet she would not have been natural to her feelings had she looked unmoved on Athelstan's little son. The touch of nature came, and with a kind expression of future happiness for the mother, she took the child from Lady Clara, and caressed him beyond his endurance. Then she coaxed him, and sat him on her lap, and thought many bitter thoughts.

'Vera,' said Mrs Morgane, very calmly, 'stoop down, that I may kiss you. I could have loved you as my daughter. I may not be allowed to see you again; still, Vera, I love you and your little child.'

'Let us still hope,' said Vera, 'hope that Mr Morgane may change his opinions, and relent. My home is very small, but very happy, and under his blessing it would be perfect. For Athelstan's sake, I pray he will not withhold it.'

'And for this child's sake,' said Mrs Morgane. 'Yet I despair!'

There was no touch of despair on Vera's face; she knew her own merits. She had a noble pride in her, feeling that all was not lost while she had health and energy, and no false modesty would allow her to think meanly of the talent she possessed.

'Yes, for their sakes, and for mine,' she said, feelingly. Her eye glistened with a parent's love as she looked on her child. She was touched with gratitude for Lady Clara's design in bringing her son to help the cause of reconciliation, and her thoughts reverted to these lines,

> 'What is all tasteless luxury to this?
> To these best joys, which holy love bestows?
> Oh Nature, parent Nature, thou alone
> Art the true judge of what can make us happy.'

'Come, Vera, I have a new flower to show you by moonlight. Grandmammas, I shall soon return,' and Lady Clara led Vera, without further ceremony, into the garden. When near the window of the room where she saw Father

Cleon and Mr Morgane in close conversation, she laughed heartily.

This act surprised Vera, and her countenance showed the feeling.

'I am the actress now; my laugh is part of the play,' said Lady Clara; but she had no merry countenance, for no countersign was made in answer. Then she walked on with Vera; both were too deeply absorbed in their own hopes and fears to talk, or to look at flowers under the effect of moonlight.

Lady Clara looked back towards the window. By the light in the room she saw distinctly Father Cleon and Mr Morgane. They were both standing; Mr Morgane held Father Cleon's hand as though taking leave of him, and a minute more left the room. Lady Clara walked back with Vera, for she was growing anxious; and when she stood near the window again, no countersign was given her to relieve her fears.

Lady Clara had seen these actions, but had not heard the words that accompanied them.

Mr Morgane had come to a point in his lifetime when the secret that he had long kept was in part to be made known. If, by divulging it, he must put himself in the power of another, he felt the man whom he trusted would use that power lightly.

'You are used to guard secrets closely, Father

Cleon, under the seal of confession. Can I trust you with one that you will honourably keep as sacred as under such seal?'

'On my word of honour, I will, if it relieves your mind to trust me.'

'I do not seek relief, Father Cleon, but I desire that you should know the fact that actuates my decision; can I trust you with that fact? Do I understand that you make an objection to be my confidant?'

'The reverse: I wish the trust to be placed in me.'

Then Mr Morgane whispered *five words* that caused Father Cleon to consider their purport for several minutes.

'That truth divulged ends our discussion and my solicited interference,' said Father Cleon.

'Before we part, I must thank you for the dispassionate and just views you laid before me whilst my secret was unknown; for the aid you tried to give to dispel a whim or harsh obstinacy that you fancied existed in me. I thank you, too, for the patient hearing you have given me in a painful case, even more painful than I—I can now—now—speak upon.' Mr Morgane became more collected; he said firmly,—'I have no animosity against Athelstan's wife—' He stopped abruptly, an expression of pain passed over his face, a struggle with his feelings confused his thoughts, this naturally confused

his words. 'His wife! Possibly now he may never know! Yet, am I right to withhold the knowledge? Heaven help me! But I can never meet her again. Good night.'

Mr Morgane left Father Cleon, whose surprise soon passed off, and he thought over his plans for the future. He was well accustomed to be the depository of important secrets, and this last added little weight to others already lodged with him.

Again Lady Clara laughed a loud, forced laugh.

'You are merry, dear Clar,' said by Athelstan, made Lady Clara and Vera turn towards him.

They read his mood in his face, that had the lines of anxiety and depression.

'I have been looking for you,' continued Athelstan. 'Why was this meeting kept a secret from me?'

'Clara must explain,' said Vera.

'To gain it,' Lady Clara replied quickly.

'To trap me, Clar.'

'A good guess. Now I will see how my scheme works. I will go alone.'

Lady Clara looked back once as she went on her way to the garden-room. Was she jealous of Vera? She scarcely dare question herself. A feeling akin to jealousy came to her as she saw Athelstan put his arm round his wife's waist as they sauntered on the lawn in the moonlight.

Lady Clara entered the room where Father

Cleon was still thinking over his duty in the case he had desired to assist.

'Have you forgotten our countersign? How do we stand?' Lady Clara asked anxiously.

'Our case is hopeless. More than a *brutum fulmen* this time.'

Lady Clara understood Father Cleon, for it was his usual expression when he found an insurmountable obstacle before him.

'What am I to do? Tell me, Father Cleon, what can I do?'

Lady Clara's hope dying within her paralysed her, and to save herself from falling, she firmly grasped the back of a chair.

Father Cleon came near to Lady Clara, and in soothing tone said,—

'My child, under wise reflections you will know the force of my words. Sow all the good in your power to soften Athelstan's lot, but try no longer to act as a peacemaker. You can do nothing.'

A hysterical laugh was the answer that Lady Clara made to this advice.

Father Cleon looked very grave, and said,—

'My work is now ended in this matter.'

'Thank you, dear Father Cleon, for befriending my cause; I am not yet beaten. I must see Uncle Morgane.'

Lady Clara was soon before Mr Morgane, sword of war in hand, yet with hope that its

keen point would be tempered into justice. This hope emboldened her to speak courageously. Mr Morgane did not check her ardent words; he was pleased she evinced such disinterested kindness in pleading for Athelstan. He knew there were many sides to the debated question that confronted him, as seen by his family; but he alone saw a dark side to it that absorbed the whole matter, and gave him his motive for action.

Mr Morgane admitted the correctness of Lady Clara's views as seen from her standpoint, but was he moved by her words? She waited his last answer in anxious suspense, and listened with strained attention to his reply.

'Clara, no one has pleaded Athelstan's cause with greater force and love than you. I have been deeply touched, but to move my decision you have failed.'

It is now as when Seneca wrote,—

'Light griefs find utterance—deeper ones are dumb.'

A dizzy feeling followed Lady Clara's first shock of disappointment, giving confusion to her thoughts. She put her arms round Mr Morgane's neck, and tried to kiss generosity out of him, as she often had done with success in her early days. The *appui* she had relied upon was gone; her tact must be brought to bear upon sentiment. In broken sentences she said,—

'Uncle Morgane, you must not send Athelstan away. You must not let him work for his daily bread. You are my guardian. Give him my income; let my gift be unknown to him. Gordon lets me spend all my money on myself, and I can school myself to do without it. You cannot refuse this?'

'Clara, say no more. I refuse your request. Remember, my child, we must reason with our feelings; not fall under their dictates when knowledge and discernment point out a better course, should the time ever be—'

Mr Morgane's voice trembled as he continued.

'God forbid!—yet should you know the fact that makes my decision wise,—then you will know I have not acted so harshly as you now deem. Hear and heed, my good Clara; never speak on this subject again. Good night! God bless you!'

Lady Clara was vanquished. She had fought well, but she had no knowledge of the quicksand she had to work upon, one that could give no foothold for conquest.

By stealth, Mr and Mrs Morgane left 'The Laurium,' long before the household had finished their night's rest. In their departure ended Lady Clara's effort to cause a reconciliation between Athelstan and his father.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SHADOW OF THE FUTURE.

'Be and continue poor, young man, while others around you grow rich by fraud and disloyalty; be without place or power, while others beg their way upwards; bear the pain of disappointed Hopes, while others gain the accomplishment of theirs by flattery; forego the gracious pressure of the hand for which others cringe and crawl. Wrap yourself in your own virtue and seek a friend and your daily bread. If you have in such a course grown grey with unblenched Honour, bless God and die.'—HEINZELMAIN.

'IT is difficult to realise I am quite awake, and, Vera, I shall require another shake before I can see how I fit my niche in the family, or even find it. I seem to be an odd piece in a puzzle, at angles with all the pieces that are set in order.'

'Well, Athie, there is a niche in the world for you. Believe me, the game now being played is not worth the trouble. Stand aloof from your family, for this last scene, and exit

must mean insult to me. You look sad, Athie ?'

'I shall be happier out of this house! Let us walk in the grounds, Vera; they are a new land to you.'

It was early morning, and the news of Mr and Mrs Morgane's hasty departure had just reached Athelstan. It was no wonder that the house stifled him in its heavy air of grandeur, whilst he was hemmed in on all sides by debts and mystery, and his position was becoming daily more untenable. His sadness generated sadness in Vera. She, too, was glad to meet the morning breeze in its perfumed freshness, and to saunter among beauties new to her.

'Is this your father's property ?'

'Yes, Vera; and a rich property it is.'

'And Gordon lives here to keep the house warm ?'

'You are right. This estate is remunerative to my father. Gordon has a fine residence rent free, and his income meets home expenses. My poor income would pay the stable bill. The stable bill! What am I talking about ? It might just pay his cowherd.'

Athelstan made a grim face, and laughed a hollow laugh.

Vera did not join in Athelstan's laughter; her tight purse-strings formed a subject too serious to laugh over.

'You are sad now, Vera. Ah! my Vera, by making you my wife, I have robbed you of wealth that others would have given you. I would not willingly have brought you to the verge of despair.'

'Despair! That word I do not know when applied to me. Despair! while I can earn money enough for all we want. And if robbed of wealth in money, have I not found great wealth, more than money can purchase, in a contented love, and a dear little home? Despair is a weakness, dear boy; our Strength is in action. Let us now laugh together at our fall from the dizzy height of wealth; but let us alight on our feet in the grand *pas de fantastique* of self-help; you shall pirouette into a rich merchant, and I into a star of the first magnitude. Come, Athie, let us laugh at the cruel Fates, and in spite of them give three cheers for the happy days to come. I shall soon make enough capital to cover your first venture, and to float your cargo of hopes; and it will be my pride to let no other hand help you but mine. I am the weaker vessel and do not despair, so you must not be faint-hearted.'

'After the disappointment I have given you, think you, my dear brave wife, that I can let you work? No! no!'

'Recall the past, Athie. I was not pleased to give up my profession.'

Vera hesitated. A sad thought came to her, for she had tasted

> 'Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
> Of Paradise, that hast survived the Fall,'

and she doubted if the glare of the footlights and the cheers of an admiring multitude could now please her; still, she would do her duty.

'I must be the worker, your only gift to me shall be your love—that gift embraces all my happiness. Home, rest, and peace are centred in you, dear wife.'

'You little know how quickly I can coin money, with just enough work and exercise of brain and muscle that conduce to health and pleasure.'

'We will not talk on that subject, we will try to keep our cottage at Windermere, and wait awhile.'

'I must talk on the subject, because an actress must earn prestige when young, to live on it when old; and my enemy is silently marching on. You shall have a home, Athie. Do not doubt that an actress can make a home very happy. Mother will interest herself in our child—already she has taught him to know a straight I, and round O, and he can pick them out from his box of letters.'

'Beginning early to help his father in a dangerous game, for I must put I.O.U. together, in truth, to get his daily bread.'

'I am afraid there is truth in your jest. From this moment my shoulder shall be put to the

wheel of our domestic cart, and though it may have sunk into a deep rut, it shall not sink deeper if I have power to save it.'

Vera ceased talking suddenly, as a grand view met her eye. For the moment she forgot the difficulties of her domestic cart in looking at her surroundings. Athelstan led her to a picturesque avenue of old trees that gave a grateful shade.

'How beautiful! How magnificent! Oh, if this place were mine, I could never leave it to go to London. Did you ever live here?'

'This was my home, and I loved it. I begged my father to let me live in one of the cottages that are scattered about. He refused, and made his bailiff happier than his son. I reluctantly went with him to London. Thank God I did, for there I met you.'

'I have been your evil genius, dragging you to ruin.'

'No, you came in my path as my saviour. I was beginning to doubt my father's excellency. He sent his philanthropists to remote countries; large sums of money returned to him, doubtless honestly gained, but I suspected he converted more material into gold than heathens into better ways. My home in London was dull, my mode of life was not congenial to my taste, and I had a craving for excitement. Vera, you were the good angel who crossed my path and

saved me from myself. This confession made, never speak of ruining me. Now that little bubble of misery is broken, come further down the avenue and I will show you the spot where I inflated many bubbles of joy.'

'Any still existing?'

'Not one; all are burst now—the last one disappeared this morning. Come, let us blow more to replace it.'

Athelstan led the way to a wild arbour, formed round a tree that did duty as the centre column to uphold the roof.

'How pretty! and this is your favourite rest. I would go in and sit awhile, and fancy you a boy again, and I your genii, good and evil.'

Athelstan and Vera blew bubble after bubble, until they reversed their previous tone of thought, and persuaded themselves to think, if once out of debt, Winander Cottage need not collapse. Under this impression, Vera blew a bubble full of vegetarian matter, with only a little space for fish and rabbit, and on such home produce life was to be sustained and economy practised. Then Athelstan blew one that conveyed intentions of help, and framed him as gardener, angler, and snarer. Then, together they blew a monster bubble—their present income would suffice to provide necessaries, and Madame Verge's money would add luxuries and comforts. This bubble broke away,

and the bright colours it twisted and curled into being, made Vera and Athelstan quite happy, and proved Lady Clara's words, that they had not the 'shadow's shadow,' ambition, in their hearts. Near them was one who would ere long read them lines most damaging to hope and bubble projects, as damaging as the following, and as true:—

> 'Blow sportive bladders in the beaming sun,
> And call them worlds! and bid the greatest show
> More radiant colours in the worlds below;
> Then, as they break, the slaves of care reprove,
> And tell them, such are all the joys they love.'

'Athie, tell me what formed your joy bubbles that are now broken?'

'Many were filled with improvements of this place when I should possess it; but see, Vera, how evanescent they proved. My birthright is of less value than a mess of porridge.'

'In defiance of birthright we shall be happy. What other dreams had you? Tell your genii truly or they will chide you for a tripping tongue.'

'I dreamed of the pretty girls I loved, and who loved me,' said Athelstan laughing.

'I never loved anyone, Athie, before I loved you. Did you always sit here alone?'

'Clara was my constant companion.'

'You made love to her,' said Vera quickly.

'To be sure, and daisy chains too; these she wore till they were pestiferous, then I buried them and made fresh chains; and she made me

bead rings, and made me one of her hair, that I afterwards discovered was made of braid—a deception I never forgave her—and I transferred my affections to other Claras immediately.'

'There was an attachment between you and Clara?'

'There was the daisy chain and bead ring business.'

'More than that when you were older.'

'Why infer more, Vera?'

'Because she has influence over you.'

'My position has been peculiar, and she has desired to befriend me, and, by following her advice I have studied our own interests, Vera. Her influence has been over our cause, not over me.'

'We will now influence ourselves to be content with small means, or boldly cast our lot into the world's chances, and bravely meet our fate. See, Athie, Father Cleon is coming through the avenue towards us.'

'That large-hearted man fought hard for our cause last evening; let us meet him.'

Father Cleon was surprised to see smiles on the faces of his young friends, whose adverse fortunes had troubled his mind so strongly that his night had been sleepless. One of the blessings of youth is to be able to paint anew the picture of life, when a blur has touched it. Fresh, bright hopes guide the hand, whilst new joys suggest the subject, and ignorance—or

rather hope—varnishes the whole. Experience has not yet left a track in time that would whisper caution; ideas are quickly acted upon; a bold sweep brushes out the old picture, and in its place brushes in the new in bold lines, for happiness or misery.

The usual morning salutations over, Father Cleon said, 'This is a fortunate meeting. I have been giving much thought to your case, my young friends. I am an old man, and wish to talk gravely to you. May I take upon myself this duty?'

'Certainly, Father Cleon, for you know my position with my father, and may help me to understand it.'

'I will try. It is hard to have this bitter trial of a lower caste forced upon you, for early impressions of luxury and ease leave an indelible stamp upon character. Alas! It is the old tale. Appearances are false; prepare to meet a change of fortune bravely. I judge by the bold, outspoken sentiments I heard you express to your father, you are not enslaved by servility or fear. May I, before your wife, speak boldly on a subject you must soon face?

'I feel a keen desire to hear all you can communicate, but would spare my wife the pain it might give.'

'I will leave you, Athie, and be no impediment to free discussion.' Vera acted up to her words, and sauntered through the avenue in the

way towards the house, whilst Father Cleon spoke thus to Athelstan :—

'I am forced to be ambiguous, yet to come quickly to my subject. My dear friend, gladly would I pause before I touched on it, that you might collect strength to hear.'

'Speak boldly, I am equal to bear the weight of any hostile act on my father's part.' There was the bright bubble of the little cottage at Windermere looking so fair and firm before Athelstan's eyes as he spoke.

'Then, my friend, be advised. Waste no time in idle repinings. Do not let this narrow scene that hems you in, and reminds you of disappointments, prevent you looking further off; not looking into the future, that is yet a blank page; but far back, even to the bright lights that have still left their glow shining through centuries, illuminating all nations, piercing a glittering track to guide men on; and read in this track how to suffer, persevere, and surmount the difficulties of this hour. Think not, dear friend, you carry a darker lantern than they once carried. Catch a spark from their now bright light, and kindle your wick and trim it into shape, that in the end you may say that it was good for you that you were nearly brought to darkness; for your reward of patient care may be a brighter and stronger flame, all-enduring, which might have languished under luxury.'

'Heaven grant it! Still I wait to hear why luxury is denied me.'

'You cannot hear that from me. But this you may hear, that to render your future days replete with peace, your first requirements are resignation and hopefulness. Depend on yourself, look for no assistance beyond the strength of your own right hand. This is a solemn pause in your life; you must weigh your prospects. Your course has been hitherto a virtuous one; continue in it. You have the refined sense to know what is beautiful; that which is beautiful and pure is divine and holy. You suffer for the faults of others.'

'Show me my enemies.'

'No, that would not aid you. Treat all men as your friends, but rely only on yourself; and make your own name.'

'Can that be necessary?' asked Athelstan in a deep and agitated tone.

'Of primary importance. You are now made poor, but not unworthy to raise yourself from adversity. My friend, you are more worthy than he who, at the eleventh hour, breaks his faith with you and turns you adrift. Now let me in the future be your father. Let my aged head guide your faltering steps of youth; come to me to balance you when you trip and want support; make me your crutch and staff. Do this, my son, and you will give an old man

pleasure. No, no; give me no thanks, but act on my words. The impartial earth is open alike to the pauper and the children of kings. We will select together the spot where you should turn the first sod that may lead to greater wealth and happiness than that you now forfeit. I have tried your patience, my son, yet, I hope, for your good, and your breakfast awaits you.'

'Your words have given me that, let me digest them. You have made me know that I am poor, and that the worthy will not despise me for my poverty. You wish me to understand by this act of rendering me poor my father virtually disowns me, and declines to fulfil the natural duties incumbent on him to a son.'

'It is well you should read my words in that sense. In short, expect nothing, and know your own exertion will prove your best friend.'

Father Cleon took a book from his breast-pocket, opened it, and appearing to read it, left Athelstan.

Athelstan returned to the arbour. He felt he was not broken down to the lowest depth; still the little cottage existed, and the bubbles he and Vera had inflated together had stability. Yet as he sat dreaming over future projects and entangling past memories with them, he felt he was no longer Athelstan Morgane, but a new man, with new ideas and new plans, all shadowy and undefined.

CHAPTER XX.

ATHELSTAN'S HOME.

'Under a tuft of shade, that on the green
Stood whisp'ring soft, by a fresh fountain side,
They sat them down; and after no more toil
Of their sweet gard'ning labour than suffic'd
To recommend cool zephyr, and made ease
More easy, wholesome Thirst and Appetite
More grateful, to their supper fruits they fell.'

MILTON.

A YEAR passed, and the bubbles inflated at 'The Laurium' were still flying boldly about at Windermere. The vegetarian diet, the lake fish, and snared rabbits brought peace to Vera's monetary anxieties, and a pastime to Athelstan. She had no debts, for Madame Verge had paid them; and he, a benedict, half agriculturist half sportsman, lived a free, happy life.

No lucrative appointment had fallen to Athelstan's lot. Many of his friends were commis-

sioned to bear him in mind and give him some niche in the world. But some friends formed their opinion that this berth or that berth could not be offered to a rich man's son; and Mr Morgane's golden calf caused Athelstan's first stumble in his road to independence. Other friends there were who had suspicion that all was not right, and this suspicion bred distrust and opinions that damaged Athelstan's cause.

Mr Morgane had foreseen some suspicion might rest on himself or Athelstan, and he proved how a mean mind, tainted with guilt, will hide its evils under another's fair reputation, if it has that power. Before the world Mr Morgane was aggrieved, and Athelstan's sin—whatever that might be—was possibly punished with lenity.

Father Cleon, though not a gourmand, loved *entrées* and *entremets*, but better than these he liked Vera's vegetarian *ménage*, for the true relish to her entertainments was her reading, and in this he delighted, and it proved a fascination to him that made him frequently repeat his visits to Windermere.

He saw that Athelstan and Vera were playing with life in their happy contentment; yet Vera's reading was not all play; her woman's wit told her to 'plough deep while sluggards sleep,' and allow no fallow to the rich soil of her brain. Thus she would keep her memory

exercised and her voice flexible, that when the time might come to play her part as bread-winner and helpmate, she would be prepared to use that energy, strength, and volition which Goethe decides is all we can claim as our own.

Vera held Athelstan to be a spoiled man, unfitted to bear the yoke patiently that hard work demanded, and she decided her shoulders would carry it well, for she had been disciplined to its weight, and it had never fretted her.

Yes, it was a happy picture of a life of simplicity that was existing in Winander Cottage.

It was a bright August day that Father Cleon and Athelstan devoted to fishing. Athelstan was still eager in sport when Father Cleon was wearied in limb and muscle, and he left his rod and carried his basket of fish as a proud trophy of his success to display before Vera. He went to the bay window surrounded by the clustering vine, now in full leaf, and looking in the room he saw Vera in the midst of her pets. She had put her needlework aside and had built up a Mount Arrarat with books, footstools, etc., etc., and had perched Noah's ark on the summit to please her little son, when her attention was taken by Father Cleon's voice—'Fish and letters, madam,'—for Father Cleon had met the postman in the avenue.

'I will take the letters,' said Vera.

A foreign letter attracted her attention, and raised her curiosity; it was for her mother.

'Come in the porch and see the fish; we seldom get such grand prizes to give you,' said Father Cleon.

'Let me take mother her letter, after that I will admire, and accept with thanks, your gift.'

Vera tied her little son in his chair, saying,—'Stanie will not be alone; doggies will stop with him while mamma is away.' Then she called Francisco and Dürer, and said,—'Guard Stanie,' and the dogs sat by the child, proud of the trust, yet longing to follow Vera.

'Mother, you have a secret from me. Who is your correspondent?'

'I never read my letters through the envelope, my child.'

But Madame Verge read something on the envelope that made her pale, and her hand tremble.

'Will you not open the letter?' asked Vera.

'Not yet. Good news will keep, and bad news I prefer to put off knowing. Besides, Vera, I must finish this book to send back to the library to-day; the reason I have sought my own company.'

'Yes, mother; still you have a secret from me.'

Vera kissed her mother and her infant daughter that lay asleep on her grandmother's lap, and left the room.

After admiring the fish in the porch that Father Cleon still waited to show her, she returned to her child, on one side of whom Dürer was sitting in a defiant attitude, and at whose feet Francisco lay crouching with his nose on the carpet between his paws, and his eyes upon the alert to ward off danger to his charge, and in his crisp, curly coat Noah, his wife and family, and many animals had coaxed themselves; for the ark had not been true to scripture, and rested on Mount Arrarat, but had capsized and unloaded its cargo of creatures before the rains had ceased.

Now, Vera, wishing in all things to be orthodox, told Stanie they would have the deluge again.

'Off guard, doggies,' she said, and gave those pets pieces of biscuit for 'gallant conduct,' and the sagacious animals were as pleased with the praise as they had been of the trust imposed in them. Then Vera threw herself on the rug beside her child, and made the animals walk in the ark in pairs, 'the elephants with trunks, the stags with horns, the mouse that ate the cheese, the cat that killed the mouse,' etc., etc., and then the deluge.

Again the ark was freighted, and rested on

Mount Arrarat, and the mother was as pleased as the child, for how sweet it was

> 'To aid thy mind's development—to watch
> Thy dawn of little joys,—to sit and see
> Almost thy very growth,—to view thee catch
> Knowledge of objects—wonders yet to thee!'

Alas! Vera, is this but a bubble?

Let a glance be cast on the letter Madame Verge read, after she had taken the precaution to lock the door of her room against intruders.

The letter was written in the Polish language, addressed no one by name, neither was it signed. The contents were sufficient to bespeak the name of the writer to the reader. The following is a translation:—

'The compact is at an end. The cause—you have broken stipulations. I had heard that D. K. had baffled our police, and was at large. This, unknown to you, was my reason for seeing you in England, and wishing that you and Vera should retire into private life, that he might not have any clue by which to find you, as you so stubbornly refused to give up that foolish name you have adopted. Well, the fault is committed; he has found you out, and on good authority I am informed you have seen him. That is enough. I withdraw all income. The cottage is yours, and D. K. may give you all that is needful for your subsistence, if he can! From this hour I am, and shall remain,

unknown to you, and our correspondence ends with this letter.

'D. K. at large is dangerous, for his work of plotting against the authorities in power is in full force. The only way to stamp this out is to act quickly on suspicion of wrong being hatched, even in places where no suspicion is justifiable. This cannot hurt the honourable man, and possibly may lead to discover the evil one.

'An inflammatory note, issued from some secret press, has already seen daylight, and has found a wide distribution, showing it is due to an organised band of no small dimensions. The note has all the characteristics of D. K.'s writing and thought; his old sentiments of going among the ignorant and cast down, telling them they have rights trampled on; that the meanest of God's creatures is amenable only to laws framed in accordance with justice, honour, and integrity; that peculation exists in high places, to meet which, money is wrung from the poor, making them poorer; that he would go among the million and make it difficult work to gag the cry, "Reform your government." These sentiments mean mischief, and the instigator of this mischief is D. K., that husband whom you should have denied admittance to your cottage. Enough; you did not. I am satisfied the meanest of

God's creatures will not pull down the governing power, or do more than, by creating annoyances, be the cause of greater means being used to prevent a cry of reform being raised by the ignorant million. I give you my promise, I will never be the means used to find D. K.'s whereabouts. My son is at work in the same mad scheme. I forbade him my house; he is now lost to me. I will seek him. Let the plotters do their work, but they will be outplotted, and Heaven preserve them from being caught red-handed.'

Madame Verge read this letter several times before she grasped the truth of her position. At last it dawned upon her, and for the first time in her life she realised she was penniless. The news paralysed her thoughts into chaotic perplexity, and rendered her unequal to any mental effort.

Her small sum for unexpected contingencies was gone—it but sufficed to clear off all debts at the cottage—and Athelstan and Vera were her debtors, with poor prospect of repaying her. Her own small income was so reduced that it would not meet even her expenses at the moderate dwelling she held rent free. Another painful truth forced itself on her mind. It was known that Demetrius Krainsky had been to her house, and she feared some clue might have followed him from it, that might be dangerous

to his safety. He felt safe under his assumed name of Rimboff, yet he had been traced and reported to have seen her. 'Woes heap'd on woes,' crushed Madame Verge's mind into a wandering state; her thoughts touched one subject, then another, yet always returning to the painful theme—How was she to live? Her eyes were as restless as her thoughts. Her infant granddaughter brought both to a standpoint by suddenly seizing the letter that Madame Verge held listlessly. This act had the effect of bringing wandering thoughts home, and as she looked on the little child, her riddle, how to live, was solved; she would undertake the duties of nurse herself, and this would save her from being helpless. Her tears were dry when she burnt the letter in the fender, and watched the delight of the child at seeing the flame, and when she unlocked the door no trace was left of the adverse news.

Madame Verge refused to hear Vera read 'As You Like It,' on the plea of fatigue. Then Vera held out another inducement,—

'We intend to sup in the garden, mother, and the effect of reading will be heightened by our garden scene among trees and lake, accessories that will give more scope to imagination than a room that cramps ideas within four walls. Come, dear.'

Vera's effective picture failed to entice Ma-

dame Verge from her sad reflections, and Father Cleon and Athelstan were Vera's only listeners.

Vera had never read nor recited better; in a clear, strong voice, her intonation was a clever study. Athelstan was visibly moved when Vera read Jacques' part as follows,—

'A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool; a miserable world!
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,
And rail'd on lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms—and yet a motley fool.
"Good-morrow, fool," quoth I. "No, sir," quoth he;
"Call me not fool, till Heaven hath sent me fortune;"
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looked on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says, very wisely, "It is ten o'clock;
Thus may we see," quoth he, "how the world wags;
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
And after an hour more 'twill be eleven;
And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot;
And thereby hangs a tale." When I did hear
The motley fool thus moral on the time,
My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
That fools should be so deep—contemplative;
And I did laugh sans intermission.
An hour by his dial—O noble fool!
A worthy fool! Motley's the only wear.'

'Pardon, Vera,' said Athelstan eagerly, 'stop to mark that passage. I have often read it,

but it has never touched me home until this minute—"From hour to hour we ripe and ripe."'

'I will remember the lines, Athie; yet why do they go home to you?'

'We will talk that over whilst we sup. Continue, dear Vera.'

As Vera read, Athelstan's mind wandered from the subject of the play. He looked proudly on his wife, and appreciated the privilege in having her companionship; he felt rich in the possession, which gold could not buy—their union in tastes. The force of the fact came to him, that the high tone of a true woman's mind elevates practically the character of a man, and forms his better ways. And was he that fool, 'Who laid him down, and bask'd him in the sun, and railed on lady Fortune in good terms?'

The reading ended, and the supper commenced. The lamps of night sparkled out one by one, they covered the blue expanse in myriads, and the queen of night rose high, and shed a light that eclipsed the shadowy flame of the lamp that hung in the tree, and played her bright, white beams upon the rippling lake, and broke through the leafy branches of the avenue of trees, fluctuating patterns on the sward, as the breeze waved the branches, and formed one pattern and chased away another. The

cottage was small, the extent of ground limited, but the outlook was broad and open, and Athelstan and Vera loved their home, its beauty, its calmness, its happiness.

Athelstan was merry as he supped, and seemed at peace with himself, but the peace was hollow. 'From hour to hour we ripe and ripe;' unto what good was he ripening? How could he muster firmness strong enough to break up his happy home? How could he become the labourer to plough in unknown lands? He would laugh out this evening, but the morrow should see his determination take some form. He had put off the evil day, but come it must. He had no greed of gold; no ambition beyond his home; but he was conscious that he must not live for himself alone.

In adversity he had not lost hope, but in his rural life, with all its novelties and happiness, he was contented—too contented with the calm and peace that surrounded him; but the fool had roused him to see that 'from hour to hour we rot and rot,' and he must seek fortune before that hour came, with all its dangers to him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BISHOP'S LETTER.

Josephine. My love, be calmer
Werner. I am calm.
Josephine. To me,
Yes, but not to thyself; thy pace is hurried,
And no one walks a chamber like to ours
With steps like thine when his heart is at rest.
Were it a garden, I should deem thee happy,
And stepping, with the bee, from flower to flower,
But here!—BYRON.

'NO letters this morning?' said Athelstan.

'Yes, Athie; one from Malavita. It is so bulky that I put it away until after breakfast. Now, dear, you can smoke your pipe over it, and see what the bishop has to say. If you like I will read it aloud.'

'No, Vera, ply your needle whilst I read.'

'I will sit with you awhile, and knit baby's socks.'

The letter commenced with ominous words,—

'My ever dear and much respected Athelstan,—I feel sorrow at hearing from your father that a great calamity has befallen you. Until I hear your version of the offence that causes your father to disown you, I will not form an unfavourable opinion of you, but will think of you as still worthy of my deepest regard. I strive to forward your father's views in introducing the opportunities to trade where missionary stations are formed; in many instances success is attained on the barter system. There is a good opening here for enterprising men; though success fluctuates, yet loss is seldom met. I recommend you to join the merchants on the coast, rather than go to a missionary station further inland.'

Athelstan clinched his pipe firmly between his teeth. Surprise seemed to take away his breath, as his mind took in the sense of this letter. His wrath was growing to a fierce heat, that made his face glow from its intensity. He continued reading in silence.

'Come alone first, and if you find the climate bearable, and you think conditions suitable, then let your wife and children join you. Your father has asked me to write full particulars to you of this place, as he leads me to infer that you and he are not on speaking terms.'

Now Athelstan's rage was beyond his power to hide, it found vent in words. 'My father adds insult to injury. Why does he not drop me entirely and leave me to myself?'

'What is the matter, Athie?'

'Nothing, love; only loud thoughts;' and Athelstan composed himself and continued to read :—

'When you come to Malavita, you must forget all that is English, and then you may be happy. The style of this country is rugged and mountainous, the valleys are narrow and of little extent, and the ravines are deep. Many mountains are thickly wooded, and the streams are numerous that rise in them, and during the rains, that average in duration six months, they become torrents, and swamp the plains. We are arriving at a little improvement in drainage and clearing land, but much more is required to improve the comfort and health of the people. Winds injurious to health visit us; the dry harmattan, loaded with fine sand, and the land breezes, charged with noxious exhalations, come to us regularly in the evenings, sweeping over the swampy lowlands; but in the mornings we are better treated, for we then luxuriate in the sea-breeze that vivifies and refreshes us with its cool and health-giving properties. If you come here, I repeat, choose a part near the coast. If

you are dyspeptic, think twice before coming at all. At times, it is true, there is a respite of these miseries, and the climate is benign and more salubrious, but only in degree.

'The soil is not fertile, but colonists have cultivated it, so that it produces crops that yield a profit. In parts we have a scorched-up, tawny growth; can I name it grass? It is difficult; the contrast is so great to our rich English meadows, and the colour under this burning sunlight adds pain to one's already aching eyes; ay, and to one's heart when thoughts rove to home memories, in this thirsty district when the torrents dry up into arid beds, and sandy rills are only left, that lose themselves in a desert of parched-up drought.

'So much for climate and style of country you are to expect. Now, we have some good things in abundance—the luscious pine apple, orange, lime, plantain, banana, and the baobab, or monkey bread, and we have the animal, too, to eat it. Besides monkeys, we have pretty antelopes, and all the usual agreeable and disagreeable denizens that enjoy life in a tropical region.

'You must let me fully know what branch of industry or trade you intend to start; I will then see that you get the cream of berth and introduction. I will befriend you to the utmost of my power, and shall be ready to receive you at my house on your arrival; but give me timely

notice, so that my fatted calf may be properly prepared for the prodigal I am to reclaim.

'Enclosed is a photograph of the chief city of Malavita, Franktown. The town is beautifully situated, rising from the edge of the water as an amphitheatre, and towering up some sixty or seventy feet above it.

'The houses are commodious and well built, so your roof is good. One word more before I write of myself. To succeed here you must bring some capital; the more you embark with, the greater hope you may have to meet success.'

Athelstan clinched his pipe again, and a thought passed his brain, that if capital be required to start him in any undertaking, he must make some approach to his father, with the object of a slight reconciliation. His wandering mind again returned to the bishop's letter.

'We have the advantage of English laws at Malavita; the natives and Europeans are respected alike in the interest of justice.

'Now, the word about myself. I have been well, and happy in my work, and I have the hope that civilisation may make a decided forward step, and render some help in destroying the slave trade.

'One last word, dear Athelstan, and I write it as one of your bishops and as your friend. You know where to humble yourself, and cast

your burden, and if your sins are as black as night, repent, and they shall be white as snow.

'Farewell. I will not think badly of you until I find you cannot justify your acts.—I am still, as ever, your sincere and affectionate

'OLD BIRCH.'

'Ah! Birch, you have stung me at last,' exclaimed Athelstan, as he looked on the letter vacantly for a minute, but his racked mind did not allow him to be long still. He thrust his letter and hands into the pockets of his pea-jacket, and kept his hands there as if to save his hair being dragged out of his head by them, as he paced the room from side to side, as a wild animal untamed to his cage. 'Yes, this stings me, stings sharply.'

'What is it, Athie? Has something gone wrong in Malavita? Some speculation of yours, dearest?'

'The letter is long, dear Vera, and I walk about to get rid of the cramp it has given me to read it.'

'No, Athie, cramp is not enough to agitate you so much, and you look angry and vexed. Tell me the cause, Athie.'

'The anxiety is in your eye, Vera; believe me, I am quite happy and right. This cramp will soon pass away. It is all the cramp that

vexes me, love. Nothing more than cramp in this foot.'

'You deceive yourself if you think you deceive me, dear boy. Let me read the letter, and then I shall know why you have cramp.'

'Not yet, Vera.'

Father Cleon entered the room. Athelstan put the bishop's letter in his hand, saying,—'More cunning work, and difficult to understand. Read it in the garden, where I will talk over the matter with you.'

'Athie, do admit me into the secret; suspense is so hard to bear.'

'You silly girl, to scare yourself with an imaginary ghost. Presto! Let it vanish.'

'It will, when I am sure you are happy.'

'I am happy, child,' and Athelstan kissed his wife, then followed Father Cleon into the garden.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISCLOSURES.

'There's not a day, but, to the man of thought,
Betrays some secret that throws new reproach
On life, and makes him sick of seeing more.'

YOUNG.

LETTERS followed letters quickly from Malavita, but Vera knew nought of their contents, except the extracts Athelstan read to her. He had felt each day, 'we ripe and ripe,' and still no move was made that gave him a chance to woo Fortune; but he had been roused from dreams, and was awake to the fact that he must toil to live.

'"I slept, and dreamt that life was Beauty;
I woke, and found that life was Duty."

And in that duty is involved the fate of others as well as my own. Now, dear old Birch, help me to do this duty. Every outlet and inlet is closed to me in England; at last I look more

favourably on Malavita as a place that I could try my luck in, and hope with some success.'

Thus Athelstan wrote to his old tutor, whom he found his only friend in need who offered him anything tangible beyond words and promises.

A second visit was made by Vera to 'The Laurium.' Vera remembered that Athelstan and Lady Clara had been children-lovers of the daisy-chain order; and, though 'perfect love casteth out fear,' it was not necessary that all caution should be thrown aside, too; therefore she made it her duty to once more accompany Athelstan to 'The Laurium.'

In studying to correctly personate character on the stage, Vera had learnt how a tragedy might grow out of a thoughtless smile; how a wandering thought became a fixed idea; how crime overtakes the unwary as they drift on life's course with little but pleasure to guide them. Vera had long ago discovered that Gordon Scott and Lady Clara were not bound together by the tie of love, and she accompanied Athelstan to 'The Laurium' as an influence to protect him, yet, as a paradox, she did not distrust him.

After Lady Clara had welcomed Vera and Athelstan on their arrival, she turned towards Gordon and said,—

'When did you return home?' and she put her hand coldly in his.

'Just now, sweet one. A longer absence from my home might have been more agreeable to you.'

'No, Gordon; I am glad to see you. I have a word to say to Father Cleon.'

Father Cleon was looking vacantly out of window at a distance from Lady Clara, and Vera watched her, scarcely knowing why, as she walked across the room to him. She appeared more majestic, taller, and handsomer, due, perhaps, to *toilette*, and her proud face had an anxious look; yet she was self-possessed. But a prouder look stole over Vera's countenance when she saw a soft, winning smile play over Lady Clara's features as Athelstan joined her and Father Cleon. And 'to fear the worst oft cures the worst,' she resolved to be cautious and use tact to counteract the early impressions that might not yet have quite died out.

A feeling of indignation came to Vera when she saw Athelstan give Lady Clara letters from Malavita that she had not been allowed to read.

On many Vera's proud bearing imposed a feeling akin to awe; on Gordon, her natural dignity of manner was of no more effect than a paper-lined hoop is to a clown—it showed an obstacle to those only who were ignorant of its simplicity, and he dashed through it easily.

'Come into the garden, Vera, and tell me what this hubbub is about.'

'What hubbub? I have heard nothing,' said Vera, as she walked out of the room into the garden with Gordon.

Gordon looked incredulously at Vera.

'I will be plainer. This family fuss about Athelstan's position with his father? You understand, we would all give our mite to Belisarius gladly, and with open hand, only we feel he should not require it.'

'Who do you mean by Belisarius? Surely not Athelstan?'

'Well, I did. He has been so blind to his interests. You should have been Fair Anonyma a little longer; yet, I own, the purest treasure mortal times afford is—spotless reputation; and you barely save reputation and lose another treasure—money. However, with a rich father, it appears an act of supererogation to propose to send the hat round, besides degrading to Athelstan's position.'

'Pray do not talk to me on such a subject.'

Vera's indignation made her feel an inch taller, just as she had felt when she met Mr and Mrs Morgane for the first and last time at dinner.

'I must talk a minute on this subject. I do wish you much to know my uncle's brain has been so long twisted by crotchets that they have twisted him into one great whim. Now, this would not matter if he did not try to put a

crook in the lot of others. It was nothing but a whim of his that placed me here when Athelstan refused to be ordained. This is a comfortable berth, and might have been Athelstan's —in truth, I wish it had been. His whim, too, led me to marry Clara when Athelstan married you; a previous whim had been that Athelstan should have married her. As if an old crotchet like him had the planning of the universe! or even the lives of his family. Now, the excitement that fires his brain is that hot, flaming country, Malavita.'

Now Vera was held in breathless attention. What was she to hear of Malavita at last?

'Did you ever look in the crater of Vesuvius, Vera?'

'Once. But what have you to say about Malavita?

'I have just left Uncle Morgane. He is red hot on Malavita, fuming like a volcano, making himself as uncomfortably heated as if he were living there. He tells me he has capital at stake in that place sufficient to rebuild London. Even asked me—your friend Gordon, who loves pleasure—if it would be agreeable to me to live among blacks, and become a missionary! He soon found I was too wary for him to ship me off to better fortune and scorching Malavita to save his chestnuts. The work a little too hot for Gordon! You say you have seen a crater;

well, Malavita is about as crusty and scorching, and slavery is as deeply rooted as its fires. The present whim and crotchet is to send Athelstan to Malavita, to endure a process of slow cremation, commencing whilst he is alive, and this to save Morgane's capital invested there, and tussle with the slave-dealers on one side, and buy ivory on the other.'

'Are you in earnest, Gordon?'

''Pon honour; true. But you can thwart all now that I have opened the north door, and the evil spirit is made visible hovering near it. Save Athelstan from passing that way—you know best how to spoke his wheel—or Morgane will begin to cremate him while he lives, as sure as he is his son. Glad I have given you the hint. It will be a mortal offence if Athelstan refuses the berth. He had better offend a father than be killed by bad climate.'

'Thank you, Gordon, for telling me this.'

'No sadness over it, Vera. If Morgane is a brute, there are others in the family who are not brutes, and there is money in the family elsewhere. If matters become worse—and they may—the crochet may stop Athelstan's income any day; then remember Athelstan can be bailiff here; first-rate berth, I assure you—would suit for a time. Clara and mother Morgane have been fussing about the old crotchet to make him liberal, and this Malavita

business is the result. Never mind, there is money in the family, and the berth of bailiff is to be had for the asking.'

'Your intentions, I know, are kind, and the money that is *in* the family doubtless will be spent by that part of the family who possess it; the money that is *required* in the family will doubtless be made by those who lack it. I think that is the law of families. The hat is not required to be sent round, nor need each give his mite to Belisarius, even should Mr Morgane tie his purse-strings tighter than hitherto. But I thank you, Gordon, most sincerely for this warning.'

Vera and Gordon had wandered near the drive, and the sound of a horse trotting was heard. A gap in the trees enabled Gordon to see some distance.

'Do you know Lord Villeroy?' asked Gordon.

'No; only by name.'

'This is the young marquis who, three years ago, came of age, and the Jews want him to anticipate money he will receive at the age of twenty-seven; at that age, possibly, he may be in tatters.'

'Can you not save him?'

'I caution him. But his enemies mislead him, and eventually will ruin him. His father died years ago, and he has been pampered into thinking too much of himself, and yet he is a

fellow of parts—clever, a memory, and volume of voice that would make a fortune if an actor. He has talent, but not that most necessary to see his own interests. When he knows the world, I fear his experience will have been dearly bought. Let us walk to meet him. I wish him to marry. A spendthrift should marry and have money tightly settled on his wife—a precaution against further evils.'

'How mercenary! Still, it is the way of the world. He is very handsome.'

Lord Villeroy saw Vera and Gordon, and reined in his horse and said,—

'Well met. I will dismount here. I see you have fresh gravel on the road near the house.'

'Thanks, Ralph, for that care. You would have dashed over it had it been your own.'

'Possibly I should, Uncle Gordon.'

'Drop "Uncle"—makes me look so old—told you so before, Ralph.'

Lord Villeroy dismounted, put his arm carelessly through the rein to lead his horse. Gordon introduced Vera as Mademoiselle Verge to Lord Villeroy.

'I am glad to meet you; a few years ago I entirely—pardon!'

Lord Villeroy was interrupted in some gallant speech by his horse making a wrong step,—

'Come, Tom, follow your nose and let your nose follow me.'

Vera was annoyed that she was identified as Mademoiselle Verge. Gordon had lighted enough flames of purgatory around her without adding another to increase her discomfort. She wished herself far away, for her thoughts were troubled with the Malavita question, and it would be difficult to talk on trivial matters with a stranger.

'Our talk was stopped just as I was about to say it was a matter of great regret to me, and to many, when you so suddenly retired into private life. This is indeed a pleasure to meet you again. Do you live near here?'

'No; a long way off—at Windermere.'

'Windermere! A charming place! I often go there. Do you fish?'

'Yes.'

'I am glad to hear that. Do you make a long visit here?'

'I return to Windermere to-morrow.'

'Oh!'

Vera echoed 'Oh!' Sad as she was, she could not resist that monosyllable escaping her lips. Lord Villeroy treated it as a question, and said,—

'I was thinking what was on my book for to-morrow. You will probably be at Windermere some time?'

'For years, I hope.'

'I forgot you lived there.'

Gordon had said Ralph possessed some talent. Vera saw in him only a handsome face and a patronising manner.

'This is a pretty place,' said Ralph.

'Charming! I think our paths now will be in different directions; I will walk across the lawn, your horse's hoofs will better suit the roadway.'

'Certainly; but the stables are not far off, and—'

'No, quite near.' Vera made a formal bow, and turned off the roadway on to the lawn.

There was whimsicality in Gordon; he enjoyed humour. He seemed to know when deep pathos or light wit would suit his object. He would be tender or melancholy, sweet or bitter, serious or merry, with as little premeditation as a caressed cat shows when she purs and suddenly strikes you with her claws. He had a vast range of imagination, and tact in using it; his telling utterances, peculiar to him, did as much mischief as good. He had as many whims as his Uncle Morgane, but they were not of a dogmatic character, and his judgment guided him to keep in check his passion for amusing himself with the incidents of the moment; and if he did not strike good or evil at the moment, the blow would not be deferred—it would never be given. He was satirical, and severely ironical when he went among those with whom he knew he was

not popular, and who put themselves forward as being more holy than they deemed him. He was clever in turning the tables upon his opponents, and could confuse his enemies into silence. He had this great advantage: an inborn strength, an even temper, a coolness that often irritated others, whilst he was unmoved. His hospitality won him many friends, and gave him popularity, and added to his influence in the pulpit. They, who would have been better pleased had he carried a serious, pious face, rather than his merry, worldly smile, forgave him many slight trespasses, and benefited by his good words and cheer. Thus he acted his double character satisfactorily to himself and his parishioners.

Gordon saw he could put his thin wedge of humour into Ralph's smitten heart—an incident he could not lose.

'You would hang your horse on the next tree, Ralph, to follow Mademoiselle Verge.'

'Hang me, if I would not. Now, Gordon, if you will stand my friend, just get through the preliminary moves for me. I could be happy for life. That heiress of yours will not do, but Mademoiselle Verge has no equal.'

'You have not made much out of your first introduction.'

'She was thrown on me so suddenly. I did my best. Now, help me to do better.'

Gordon did not answer, except by quoting—

'"Happy they! the happiest of their kind,
Whom gentle stars unite, and in one fate
Their hearts, their fortunes, and their beings blend."'

'Hear, hear. You are a good fellow all round, everybody agrees. In the end you shall tie the knot at last that you have long desired. Now put me on the right scent. Does Mademoiselle Verge leave here to-morrow?'

'Yes, to-morrow.'

'Do you know if she will travel alone?'

'Oh, no, not alone, but with her husband.'

'You monster! No!'

'Mademoiselle Verge is married to a cousin of mine, Athelstan Morgane.'

Lord Villeroy looked bewildered. So ingenuously had he spoken his mind, that to retract a word was impossible. A little of his good temper left him. His fine brows knit together; he checked his horse and stood still as he said,—

'Why did you introduce Mrs Morgane as Miss Verge? Is it true that she is married? There is something in the cut of your coat that always leads me to be confidential, and I forget it hides Gordon Scott under it.'

'Come, Ralph, trot on your horse. My cousin Vera is married, and so lost to you; and this one-sided, spontaneous love will soon wear

out. Never think of it, that is the way to kill it; and, above all, never see the object of it.'

Ralph's brows were still contracted, and he did not move an inch; he felt hurt and angry, and in a foolish position.

'I assure you, Ralph, this is quite an accident. You and Vera might have been enemies. I little knew you would have found in her the remnant of an old romance. You have too generous a heart to hate me for this accident; and believe me, in all honour, not a word you have said shall pass my lips.'

'I accept that promise; and as Mademoiselle Verge is Mrs Morgane, I will not give another thought to her. Now to the business that brought me here to-day. Advise me; you have before; and I have been a fool not to follow your advice; but I suspect there is foul play somewhere, and I want you to help me to spot it home.'

Now the horse and Ralph moved on towards the stable, and Gordon was soon discussing the mysteries of Ralph's troubles, and helping him to unravel them.

Vera and Athelstan returned next day to Winander Cottage, in ignorance of the incident of Ralph's misplaced admiration. Gordon kept counsel, and denied himself the pleasure of a joke at Ralph's expense.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ATHELSTAN'S VISIT TO MAGNA HOUSE.

'The cautious wolf dreads the pit, the hawk the suspected snare, and the fish the concealed hook.'—HORACE.

ADY Clara had been outwitted—unfairly caught in the meshes of a net of her own construction. She had prevailed on Mr Morgane to assist Athelstan, and the assistance he proffered would separate them, possibly, for ever.

At the cottage, 'Love was the ruling passion; but love ratified by wedlock, gentle, constant, and refined.' It was distressing that a love from without should mar this holy concord.

'Assure me again, Athie, that you confide all your plans to me, and that Clara has not taken my place in your confidence.'

'Surely our trust in each other is not so weak that I need enforce a truth twice. Still, Vera, by her advice, I will test my father's better feeling once again.'

'Let it be the last time,' said Vera, with a proud bearing. 'I would dissuade you from

going now;' then she checked herself and added,—'Ah, no! it may be well to give him one more chance of doing a right act.'

Athelstan arrived at Magna House, jaded and anxious. As a son he had a right to sue for mercy, and in that spirit he met his father.

Athelstan had lost the ease that prosperity gives to spirit and manner. His light step, bright smile, gay word were wanting, and his difficult errand deepened his depression.

Mr Morgane received him coldly. He scanned him from head to foot, as if he wished to impress him with the truth of an unspoken thought, 'How is it you are here again?'

'Have you an hour to spare to me, father?'

'I prefer that you should call me Mr Morgane. I have a short time I can devote to you. Say on.'

Mr Morgane sat down again, assumed an attitude of attention, that did not put Athelstan at his ease after his chilling remark; and he knew every word said would be met by a snarl.

Athelstan was too much alive to his own interests to allow his temper to be seen, but he felt it rising high enough to agitate his voice as he said:

'Will another hour suit you better to see me than now?'

'No; say what you wish to say now. Your voice is thick. Is it from the effects of wine? Are the rumours true I hear of you?'

A look of scorn came to Athelstan's eye; the

feeling of scorn gave him the strength he lacked to speak; its power subdued the fears that crippled his freedom of thought.

'If the rumours are against me, it would be just to tell me their nature, then I could deny or assent to the truth of them.'

'I repeat, your voice is thick. Why become a vegetarian, if you continue to be a wine-bibber. Why, I ask you?'

The graveness expressed on Mr Morgane's face was ludicrous as he said this. Athelstan looked on his father in amazement.

'Speechless. Ah! the guilty conscience! the guilty conscience!'

'My conscience is clear,—it is an ægis of strength to me. I do not tremble under its weight.'

Mr Morgane said abruptly,—'Can I alter fate? Can I plan a pathway in life for you to follow? Can I?—but words are wasted on the deaf, as light is on the blind.'

Mr Morgane closed his eyes, his head fell forward, and his hands hung heavily on the arms of his chair. Thus he remained several minutes. Athelstan was alarmed at his appearance, and while he took time to consider how he should treat him, Mr Morgane looked up again and said in a mild voice,—'Athelstan, how long have you been here?'

'A quarter of an hour. You are tired or ill, I fear.'

'Both tired and ill. Have I been dozing? Surely I have been dreaming. You spoke to me about my will. A strange coincidence, I signed my will this morning. It is my duty to tell you I have not mentioned your name in it, but I have placed a sum of money in your name at Steeples & Pews. Call on them, they have my instructions. You have chosen to separate yourself from me, instead of—of— What was I saying? Oh! it is gone. Well, I have pressed you hard; I wonder you could have lived on the pittance I gave you. You might have been rich if you had annulled your marriage. I had the power to do it, had you met me half way. Even now it is not too late,' Mr Morgane said in a low voice, in a confidential manner.

'I will not stoop to dishonour,' Athelstan said with caution. 'What gives you this delusion?'

'Delusion! Athelstan, there is a history in all families. Among brothers and sisters you find some noble, some disgraced—even one as I am. What am I saying?

'You spoke of yourself.' Athelstan was eager to hear more.

'Ah! of myself. True, I was once going headlong to perdition; my friend saved me; he alone knew how evil I had been. He pulled me out of the devil's hands, and made me drink water. He died; then I breathed freely. No one living knew my sin, and I lived a reformed life.'

Mr Morgane paused. Athelstan wished to touch old memories in his father's mind, and said,—

'You reformed your ways, and married my mother?'

Mr Morgane turned sharply round in his chair, and faced Athelstan, who was by his side, and with eyes glaring with rage, and in a voice of anger said,—

'Who told you?'

'I simply guessed that your marriage was the natural termination to the course of a wild life, from your own inference.'

'I am always prepared for calumny; you will not escape it. I will not be questioned on the subject of my marriage—and by you.'

Athelstan was silent, but he looked steadfastly at his father in surprise.

Mr Morgane seemed under some fascination as his wild look of rage became one of terror, under Athelstan's gaze; he shrunk back in his chair, muttered with a hollow sound,—'I see it again, I see it again. I have seen it before!'

Mr Morgane, with an effort, covered his face with his handkerchief, for he was not able to avert his eyes or even close them.

Athelstan looked on in surprise, as Mr Morgane sat shivering with his face hidden; he did not venture to speak a word. When the shivering agitation ceased, Mr Morgane roused himself, threw his handkerchief on the floor,

without thought given to the action, and his countenance was livid and denoted much pain. He looked around him as a man who had been scared by witnessing a ghastly scene, or had awoke, dazed, from a dismal dream.

'You feel ill,' said Athelstan tenderly.

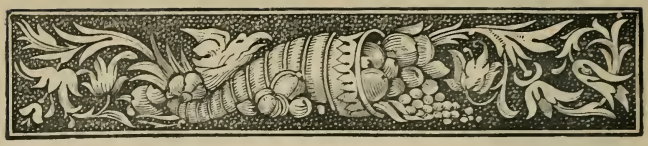
'Ill in mind. Yes. It is an old sore.' Mr Morgane spoke with difficulty and in a husky troubled voice. 'Athelstan, bear witness that I would have expiated the past unto the last hour of my life had you never married that girl. Now I have done my best. Go; never let me see you again—never, never, never.'

'Can I assist you? Fetch my mother? What can I do for you?'

'Go! go without saying another word to me, or to anyone in my house. Go, sir!' Mr Morgane raised his voice loudly, but did not move from his chair.

'As my presence seems to offend you I will; yet let us part in peace, as friends.'

Mr Morgane recoiled, as Athelstan approached him. 'Stand off! go! go! 'tis the same old face.' He thrust his arms out, as he spoke. Athelstan left his father, and went in haste to Dr Clearall, the physican and friend of the Morgane family; he told him he was required immediately at Magna House, and he was to call to see his father as a friend. Dr Clearall understood this ruse, and drove quickly to Magna House.



CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS MORGANE'S DEVICE.

'Known unto these, and to myself disguis'd!
I'll say as they say, and persevere so,
And in this mist, at all adventures go.'

Comedy of Errors.

IN the whirl of railway travelling, Athlestan and his mother passed each other in the 'up' and 'down' trains between London and Windermere.

At the same time that Athlestan was with his father, Mrs Morgane, shrouded under a thick veil, entered the garden of Winander Cottage. Again was the loud bell rung by one who sought a clue to a possibility, but not with the same boldness as when Mr Morgane wished to satisfy himself that all the probabilities suggested to his mind had existence in fact. Now, it sounded to the touch of a woman racked with painful uncertainty, dreading, yet seeking to hear, a probable solution to a difficulty that

made her position in her own house an enigma to her. She sought Athelstan, but he was from home; his absence made her feel her journey to Windermere was fruitless. But as she hurried away along the avenue she met Vera, and was recognised by her. Still she hurried on; it was not until she gained the end of the avenue that she turned to speak to Vera, who had followed her to the entrance gate.

'I may speak to you here, Vera; here we are in the wide world; I am bound by no promise that should prevent that. No, I will not touch your hand. I wish to be conscientious.'

'May you not rest in our cottage, Mrs Morgane?—you look tired.'

'Tired and weary of life; but you look gay and happy, my child. Athelstan told me his cottage was peaceful and beautiful: I find it is both.' A weary, heavy sigh escaped Mrs Morgane unchecked, called forth by remembrance of the past. 'Vera,' she said sadly, 'make much of this hour of sunshine. I once had such a gleam,—not one ray is left of it now. I fear the tyranny that prevents me from entering your cottage, is the tyranny that will ruin your happiness.'

'I guess your meaning. But let Mr Morgane do his worst—pronounce an anathema on me and Athelstan, never can he alter the trust and love we have in each other. Athelstan

may be poor and yet poorer, but he has an intellectual wealth no poverty can blight. You are his mother, you know his simple noble character, his warm heart, his robust, joy-loving nature. A father's anathema and fickleness may embitter for a time his sensitive proud feelings, but can never rob him of his nature.'

'Thank God, Vera, you appreciate him.' Mrs Morgane was about to hurry away abruptly.

'Have you no message to leave for Athelstan?'

'No. I must be conscientious.' Mrs Morgane hesitated; a moment's reflection guided her. 'Tell Madame Verge to overtake me out of sight of this cottage. I break no promise in speaking to her.' Mrs Morgane left Vera without waiting her reply, or saying a farewell word.

When Mrs Morgane was joined by Madame Verge, she came to the gist of her subject with little preamble, saying,—'Madame Verge, I have heard it mooted that your name of Verge is assumed. For purposes of far more importance than idle curiosity, I came here to ascertain the correctness of this report from Athelstan. He is not at home, therefore I ask an answer from you. It is for legal purposes that I wish as clear an answer as possible; and for that reason, I make but little ceremony in addressing you on this subject.'

This question staggered Madame Verge. How was she to give an answer that could satisfy a legal purpose, and what legal claim was it to satisfy?

Madame Verge's thoughts flew fast and wide; they touched on many subjects in a brief space of time; and though her face was calm, Mrs Morgane's question caused her a degree of agitation that she found difficult to hide.

The pause caused by Madame Verge's hesitation was broken by Mrs Morgane saying,—'Your true name I wish to have, to enable me to make you trustee for your daughter's children, a position I hope you will fulfil when that requirement is necessary.'

'Certainly I would gladly undertake the trust. My name is Vera Caston,' replied Madame Verge, after careful reflection.

Mrs Morgane's face bleached to a deadly paleness, barely perceptible through her thick veil. The utterance of the name Caston gave her a shock that rendered her speechless.

For the space of some minutes these two women stood silently before each other; both engrossed in thoughts born of past personal experiences, that made their meeting one of those remarkable coincidences that occur as strange events in life.

Mrs Morgane, on regaining her self-possession, said,—'Thank you, I shall remember Vera

Caston is your name. Good-bye.' She could not give her hand to Madame Verge after the discovery she supposed she had made, but bowed formally, as she hurried away in the direction she had ordered her vehicle to await her.

Then came to her the questions in their fullest import that Mr Morgane had so often asked,—'Who is Vera Verge? Can she be Athelstan's wife?'

CHAPTER XXV.

FORTUNE-SEEKING.

'Dispute it like a man.
I shall do so,
But I must also feel it as a man.
I cannot but remember such things were
That were most precious to me.'—SHAKESPEARE.

THE amount of money that Athelstan received from Steeples and Pews was less than a tithe of the sum he had expected it to be; still it was a sum that would produce the modest income that his father had allowed him since his marriage, thus giving him a poor subsistence that would bridge over the time, and would enable him to arrive at Malavita at a cool season of the year, which would be necessary to ensure health. No word of his intention was spoken, for that interval of time gave a remote possibility that something would 'turn up' better than Malavita. Athelstan did not rest on his *luck*, but he followed

Cobden's advice when he said, 'Labour, with keen eyes and strong will, will turn up something.' He laboured with heart and mind in his labour; but days, weeks, months passed, and the better thing did not shadow its advent, the *something* striven for was still a Chateaux en Espagne.

Madame Verge had asked Vera if Athelstan would always be idle, and pass his time in London and at 'The Laurium.'

'We have enough for our quiet life, and when our income fails to meet expenses, then I can work. See, mother, we understand how to "screw" now better than when we were first so poor; and Athelstan is looking out for something, and we are very comfortable. You have a happy capacity to make light of our troubles, and I inherit some of that bright pick-me-up.'

Athelstan had just returned from a week's visit at 'The Laurium,' and Vera had joined her mother, after having seen Athelstan start, with tackle and rod, to while away his time in fishing. He left Vera at the entrance gate with a merry face—the merry face left him when he was alone.

The phantom of fiction that was growing around him became faint, and a clear reality was taking its place, bringing with it disappointment in place of self-deception. He tried to look calmly on this, his first grief, but it pro-

duced a restless impatience, a craving for solitude, and to be away from his wife and home.

He knew his listless step would be unnoticed by the happy rustic and his young witch, as he walked to the punt; and he could muse over his rod, and give way to the feeling that all men were happier than he.

How many men have mused as Athelstan; and alas! how many more still may muse over their rod in solitude, tortured with the thought that a bright union of soft love must end, to be replaced by a painful void, to enable the struggle for existence to be made in a cold, hard world. A man may wrestle strongly against despair and pain in seeing his happiness about to forsake him; nevertheless he is pained, and does despair, if Hope, with friendly aid, does not exist in his mind to support him. He feels, in proportion to the greatness of his happiness, the pain at seeing the halo that surrounds his family hearth grow fainter and fainter, in the future for him. Vera was to Athelstan the centre of that happiness,

> 'A haunting music, sole, perhaps, and lone
> Supportress of the fairy roof, made moan
> Throughout, as fearing the whole charm might fade.'

A feeling of stupefaction seemed to seize Athelstan's mind; he could not plan or think steadily of the future. He took no heed whilst

fishing, that time was passing away; his thoughts only repeated again and again one refrain—his ruin and his misery.

The setting sun, the darkening shadows on the fresh green-wooded hills and on the rippling waters, and a distant peal of thunder were unheeded; but the voice of Vera disturbed Athelstan, and reminded him he was a living man, and not a dream.

The gloomy forebodings that had engrossed him for hours prevented him playing his intended part of a hopeful man, and Vera, for the first time, read in his face the lines, all visible and plain, of a sad heart; his eyes seemed to have lost lustre, his cheeks hung hollow, and his mouth was lined with care. Had these marks of grief grown in a day, or had he in her presence smiled them away to deceive her?

> 'Tis late before
> The brave Despair,'

and it was sad to read that despair had settled to feed, in its flesh-devouring properties, on Athelstan.

'Athie, we are waiting for our fish, and a storm threatens,' Vera had said.

'My love, it will not overtake us; nor need we mind that storm—a passing cloud.'

Vera helped Athelstan to put up his rod and

tackle, and peered into the fish-basket, and all the while she noticed he was sad and silent.

She carried his rod as she walked beside him through one of England's lovely landscapes—the broad sheet of water, fringed by the spring tints fresh in their varied shades, yet here and there a tree that would be clothed with leaves at a later time, now stands almost bare, telling plainly winter is just past.

'Athie, do you still like this country life better than the turmoil of London?'

'Why ask me, Vera?'

'Because you look sad, and you are seldom here now; so much at "The Laurium," or in London. I begin to dread one of those places has given you a distaste for our tiny home.' Vera, with a look of timid, loving appeal, fixed her eyes on Athelstan's sad face.

His countenance lighted up with a soft brightness, yet knowing that the old home must pass away, and new plans be laid, as he said,—'Vera, have you ever formed an idea of heaven? If you have, such as you would form heaven, so is my home to me.'

A few yards in advance of Athelstan and Vera was Lord Villeroy walking towards them.

'Again we meet, Mrs Morgane,' he said; 'been fishing, I see, but you told me you would not fish to-day. I have had moderate luck; and you?'

'I told you truly, I have not been fishing; my husband has, and has had a good day's sport.'

'Let me carry the rod. I shall pass the cottage.' And Lord Villeroy walked with Vera.

'Have you seen my husband before to-day?' asked Vera.

'It is strange, Mrs Morgane, though he and I are some kind of cousins, I have never met him.'

'Family connexions do become scattered. I must introduce you to your relative.'

The introduction over, Lord Villeroy talked affably on general matters, until they reached the cottage. He entered it as if he had always been on a cousinly footing with Athelstan, who considered him a forward imp. Then he remembered he had been often from home lately, and possibly Lord Villeroy had grown intimate with Vera during his absence; and he found, farther, that his children and dogs were quite friendly and at home with him.

Days, weeks, months passed again, summer came, and though Athelstan did man himself to bear the sharp sting with which misfortune probed him, endured silently and planned secretly, yet his face plainly told his tale. The joybeam had gone from his eye; a blank look of vacant thought, ever miles away, grew

habitual to him. When the round, chubby, dimpled arms of his children were held out to him, and their ruddy lips were pouted to invite a kiss, he would answer their appeals in a silent fashion, as a mechanical action animated with no soul.

Vera saw it was not the fascination of 'The Laurium' that estranged Athelstan and altered his disposition in his home; for he was always at home now. When his children failed to rouse him from his gloom, and his sympathetic dogs might lick his hand and meet with no caress, she knew his changed fortune was a grief she could no longer smile away. But she did smile still, and she bore her burden bravely. Yet, as a flower fades that is hidden from the sunlight, so her colour faded from her cheek under the gloom of her husband's sadness. Her youthful step grew less elastic, the premature signs of a staider age were fast fixing their mark on all that had been her charm. In reading now, her voice would lose its proper intonation, as she furtively looked towards Athelstan, on whom her thoughts were more firmly rooted than on the subject that she read.

Athelstan was not blind to this vast change. It hurt him; it was the worst stroke of misery that touched his disappointed life. Could he have left her happy with her mother and children, gay and youthful at heart, all hopeful of

his future, how much consolation he could have gained in recalling her happy face; but now even that was gone, and replaced by worn features to haunt him when absent.

It was early autumn when Athelstan was troubled in mind by a difficult task: how he should tell Vera his determinations and plans that were ripe to be carried out. He had postponed until to-morrow so often, that the day arrived that no longer could be allowed to pass away without the disclosure of his future movements.

It was late in the afternoon, Vera and Athelstan were sitting under the old carved porch, the dogs were lying about lazily at their feet; Madame Verge and her grandchildren were by the lake gathering wild flowers. It was a moment to be seized by Athelstan for his ordeal; but his heart failed him as he listened to Vera, who tried to cheer him with her light, bright talk, that she seemed ever ready to summon to aid her, when serious matter would be unwelcome. Athelstan was too absorbed in his acutely painful position to smile at her little sallies and well-meant challenges for repartee, and Vera became silent, fearing lest her talk annoyed him; then he became silent and more thoughtful.

This silence lasted a long time, until Vera broke it by saying: 'Athie, you want a change

of scene. Lovely as our surroundings are, the lake shining at the end of this pretty avenue, and we enjoying the prospect from this dear old porch, still, dear, you must have some change.'

Vera's words helped Athelstan to his subject. 'I have been thinking so for some time, dear Vera, and I contemplate making a change soon.'

'To the sea?'

'Yes, Vera; and you will be very happy here while I recruit health.'

'I will endeavour to be happy in counting the hours you will be away. Where will you go, dear boy? To Scotland, or the south?'

'South-east. I think of going to Malavita.'

'To see the bishop, and return? Is it not an expensive journey?'

'It is an expensive journey, so when I go to visit the bishop I shall remain with him some time.'

Then Athelstan explained to Vera that nothing offered suitable to his requirements in England, and how he had settled the sum of money he had received from his father on her and their children, and cleared his debt with Madame Verge; and how the good bishop, his old tutor, out of pure love for him, had offered him an advantageous opportunity to retrieve his fortune, that it would be wrong in him not to embrace with alacrity, for it was like fortune knocking once more at his door.

Vera could not dissuade him; she had been the innocent cause of his ruin and all impending evils; could she again stand in his way of making his fortune now?

'Malavita is so unhealthy, Athie; have you considered that?' was all she said. But she thought of all Gordon had told her.

'Fully,' Athelstan replied; well knowing, for the reason of unhealthy climate, he had left his money in England, and intended to make his venture only on the foundation of his own strong will, supported by the credit of his bishop. 'The bishop's health has been good,' he added, 'and I shall follow his rules and his plans, for it is an advantage to be taken under the wing of a bishop, although I am not in holy orders. Vera, you know well "we must take the current when it serves, or lose our venture." It is now at its flood, and I will not take Mrs Partington's mop to stop its course.'

'No, dear Athie, indeed no; let it lead on to fortune. Still we have some time yet to talk over these matters.'

'In four days' time I start.'

'So soon!'

Now the moment came that Vera saw life without the gloss of varnish. All the cross lines, and knots, and seams of life were visible. Life's fair picture grew dim before her eyes, and she wondered she had not seen more than

shadows on its brightness before this bitter moment. The knowledge that Athelstan must go to an unhealthy land was as a sudden catastrophe that made her feel four days might end their union for ever. She found, to her sorrow, that deep tragedy was played in life's drama; that art but imitated stern realities. She realised that the bitterest pain was not wrung from the body's tortures, but from the mental anguish that in silent, hopeless helplessness bears down the mind under its weight into a weak, spiritless misery.

'So soon!' Vera could say no more, for she felt her life's joys were crushed; that no sympathy from without could soothe the misery of the wrench that the day of parting must bring.

The day of parting came. Lady Clara was at Windermere. She made one more dash to save Athelstan from Malavita. He was deaf to all her suggestions; she had lost her influence over him. He replied,

'I have already listened to you too long; until the clouds have become thicker and darker around me that I scarcely know one light spot to lead me in a right course. I must go now, in the hope that I have chosen the road to fortune.'

'Your final move. I only heard at the eleventh hour, and that from Vera.'

'That was my wish, Clar dear. Now, good-

bye, and had I been wiser this move would have been made a year ago, but my love of my home too strongly held me back.'

These parting words were like leaden shot discharged into an old wound that made Lady Clara wince, and she muttered a wish for Athelstan's success as she kissed him, and knew how bitter and false her life must ever be.

Tears were in Lady Clara's eyes as she watched the vehicle that held Vera and Athelstan pass out of the cottage gates *en route* to the railway station.

Vera was brave and resigned, and listened calmly to Athelstan's expressions of hope, and inferences that it was 'easy to scorn delights and live laborious days' in anticipation that the time would come, when, with ample fortune, he would again return to his happy home.

Vera saw Athelstan on board ship, and when she returned to Winander Cottage it would be difficult to decide which heart was most sorely tried: hers on looking on Athelstan's vacant chair, or his in leaving it vacant to seek fortune alone in the wide world, almost penniless, and unused to work except in the form of pleasure.

END OF VOL. I.

D : V : 6.4.88.

COLSTON AND COMPANY, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

X04W

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 041700342